

JUDAISM

Passivity and Narration: The Spell of Bashevis Singer
Dan Miron

Beyond the Congregation: The Need for a Pattern of Personal Prayer
Lawrence A. Englander

The Bible and Political Thought: Daniel J. Elazar's Contribution to the Jewish Political Tradition
Harvey Shulman

The Religious Dimension of Yiddish Secularism
Gershon Winer

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JUDAISM

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In increasing measure, modern men are turning again to the quest for a worldview on the issues that are timeless — the meaning of life, the challenge of death, the purpose of suffering, the significance of the individual, his relation to society, and the goal of history. In order to advance this enterprise of spiritual discovery of our time this Journal has been projected. It will be primarily concerned with the philosophy, ethics, and religion of Judaism as a factor in the contemporary world . . .

We are committed to the proposition that Judaism has positive value today for Jews and for the world . . . At the same time, we disassociate ourselves from the dangerous tendency toward the hardening of party lines on the contemporary Jewish scene . . . The members of the Board of Editors belong to every school of Jewish life or to none. The trends popularly referred to as Orthodox, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, as well as others that as yet have no specific names, have their advocates among us, though no institution or movement is officially represented . . . Undoubtedly, our differences will find expression in these pages, but we shall be at one in opposing the dogmatism which takes for granted that one's own particular standpoint has a monopoly on truth and the authoritarianism which would suppress any contrary point of view.

Judaism will be dedicated to the quest for truth in the spirit of freedom. Our columns will be open to anyone who has something significant to say and the ability to say it well. New and unconventional interpretations, whatever their standpoint, will be welcomed from every source, for we share the conviction of the Talmud that "Both these and the others are the words of the living God." *From the introductory article by Robert Gordis, "Toward a Renaissance of Judaism" in Vol. I, No. 1.*

The First Reader

A Farewell to I.B. Singer

“Passivity and Narration: The Spell of Bashevis Singer,” is a keen analysis of the late writer’s world-view and his contribution to world literature. In this paper, *Dan Miron* makes the point that Singer believes that man cannot change the world but that “passivity is the only correct stance” in the face of the chaos that engulfs man from within and without. Surely not an optimistic point of view, but one that runs through much of Singer’s output which is, nonetheless, intensely soul-satisfying, so great is his narrative skill. The Nobel prize was a testimonial to it, and his continuing popularity perhaps is an even greater one.

Daniel J. Elazar and Jewish Political Thought

Though the Jews have been a people without a country for many more centuries than they were established in their own country and with their own government, there was a system of Jewish political thought. *Harvey Shulman* discusses one of the major modern thinkers on the subject in “The Bible and Political Thought: Daniel J. Elazar’s Contribution to the Jewish Political Tradition.”

There is, in governance, a tripartite division under the sovereignty of God — three *keterim* (crowns): *keter Torah* (the transmission of God’s teachings), *keter kehunnah* (the link between God and His community through symbols and rituals), and *keter malkhut* (the existence of civil authority). Each of these is simultaneously distinctive and interdependent.

Elazar has devoted a lifetime to the study of the Jewish polity, and in this paper the reader is given an introduction to what he has achieved.

New Israeli Holidays

In the spring of the year, Israelis mark a number of events in recent Jewish history. There is Israeli Memorial Day, on the 4th of *Iyyar*; there is Israeli Independence Day on the 5th of *Iyyar* (this year in the first week in May); and Jerusalem Liberation Day on the 28th of *Iyyar*. Just preceding all of these occasions, there is, in the prior Hebrew month of *Nissan*, Holocaust Memorial Day, *Yom HaShoah*, (this year April 30). *Joel B.*

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Wolowelsky maintains that, despite its falling in the prior Hebrew month, *Yom HaShoah* is an “*Iyyar* Event,” signifying a national, Israeli orientation, setting up an appropriate background for Israel’s Independence Day. In the course of a generation, as he points out, historical perspectives change and events acquire a somewhat different significance.

Judaism and Christianity

Among the liberal Christian theologians of recent days, Reinhold Niebuhr unquestionably is in the vanguard. In his attitudes towards Jews and Judaism he was certainly extraordinary in that he advocated the universal message as well as the particular significance of Judaism. He saw Christianity as related to Judaism and all the prophets as having a universal vision, with special meaning for the Jews. In “The Hebraic Foundation of Christian Faith According to Reinhold Niebuhr,” *Eyal Naveh* discusses in detail many of the theologian’s views, as well as the contemporary reactions to him by both Jews and Christians. Approbation came from all sides, though an occasional difference of opinion did crop up among them. Niebuhr is undoubtedly one of the righteous Gentiles who has a share in the world to come.

A Pitch for Prayer

Using the metaphor of an orchestra and its musicians who, in addition to performing together, play individually for their own delectation, *Lawrence A. Englander* develops the idea of private prayer as a means of personal enrichment as well as, ultimately, a source of benefit to congregational worship. He offers four specific steps for the development of personal prayer to encourage the individual on the path toward greater spiritual awareness and satisfaction. “Beyond the Congregation: The Need for a Pattern of Personal Prayer,” is a practical “how to” paper in a non-practical but highly valuable area of life.

“Who Is A Jew?” Is An Old Question

Though “Who Is A Jew” seems to have been much on the recent Israeli political agenda, it is not a new problem. There were always converts to Judaism and their acceptance raised questions. In “Covenant, Conversion and Chosenness . . .” *Baruch Frydman-Kohl* writes about the differing approaches of Maimonides and Halevi. The former was, by far, the more lenient, while the latter was more restrictive. As the author says, “for Maimonides one’s religious and human status is not dependent on biology, but on the truth of one’s actions and beliefs.” For Halevi there is a biological-national orientation to Judaism which imposes on converts a status inferior to that of born Jews so that they can never achieve the level of prophecy. This restriction notwithstanding, Halevi managed to con-

vince the King of the Khazars of the great merit of Judaism so that he and all of his people converted.

A Harmonization of Seemingly Contradictory Elements

What makes Yiddish Secularism different from other secularisms? The answer is: when, despite the seeming contradiction, it has an underlying religious mood. In "The Religious Dimension of Yiddish Secularism," *Gershon Winer* demonstrates that, despite the initial flouting of religious beliefs and practices by the Yiddish secularists, there developed a pattern of return to tradition as time went on. In this highly informative paper, the author presents an aspect of Jewish life that is little known these days.

R.B.W.

We deeply mourn the passing of the Editor-Emeritus of JUDAISM

ROBERT GORDIS

and of

two members of the Board of Contributing Editors

GERSON D. COHEN

and

JAKOB J. PETUCHOWSKI

יהי זכרונם ברוך

Passivity and Narration: The Spell of Bashevis Singer

DAN MIRON

Translated by Uriel Miron

ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER, LAST OF THE GREAT Yiddish story-tellers, passed away at a ripe old age, crowned with international success and renown. His death seems to carry a note of half-reconciled farewell to a rich and vital literary tradition that won neither the appreciation nor the longevity that it deserved.

The beginnings of this tradition appeared about a hundred and thirty years ago in the form of the juvenile works in Yiddish of Mendele Moykher-Sforim and Yitschak Yoel Linetsky: *The Pupil [eye]*, *The Magic Ring*, *Fishke the Lame*, and *The Polish Lad*. From these roots Yiddish fiction flowered into its "classical" age with the mature Mendele Moykher-Sforim, Sholem Aleichem and Peretz. The decades between the two World Wars saw the great branching out of this tradition in the works of maestros like Dovid Bergelson, Der Nister and Moshe Kulbak, and in many other talented writers, such as Sholem Asch, Itshe Meir Weissberg, Yonah Rosenfeld, Yisrael Yehoshua Singer, Yosef Opatoshu, E.M. Fuchs and their colleagues. During the war and after it, in the dark, final days of Stalin's rule, the Yiddish literary tradition succumbed to the axe-blows of murderers and tyrants, and now it seems to have reached its final hour. In the long chain of brilliant and colorful reflections, highly diverse and yet complementary, of the life of the Jewish Ashkenazi tribe of eastern Europe as it was mirrored in the minds of the tribe's most talented members, soaked through with the essential juices of its unique historical presence and yet cut loose from their cultural moorings, open to the culture of their times — in this chain the final link has been closed.

These days, it is said, prophecy is the privilege of fools alone, and this rule may apply even to the prophecy regarding the future of the Yiddish tongue and its literature. Nevertheless, it seems safe to say that the spiritual-literary reality that found its last concentrated expression in the works of Bashevis Singer is no longer. This was clear to all, long before Bashevis himself reached the pinnacle of his literary successes with the receiving of the Nobel prize for literature in 1978. This witty, skeptical Jew, devoid of all pathos and full of humor, who combined sarcasm with tragedy and fatalism, traveled across the American and international literary scene like a "last of his kind." The international cultural community that lavished its appreciation upon him (as opposed to the servings of envy and

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hatred that he received from the rapidly shrinking Yiddishist cultural establishment), did so, of course, because of his ability to tell stories that conquered hearts almost in any language, and in any place where they were told; but it did so, among other reasons, as a gesture of farewell to a literary culture that was rich and vital in its day, and as a gesture of grief and regret for the horrifying circumstances that brought that culture to the point of extinction. Isaac Bashevis was the last great emissary of the kingdom of Yiddish to the world of western culture in the second half of the twentieth century.

Because of this historical representivity, which, by the way, was thrust upon Bashevis neither to his benefit nor by his consent, and without taking his qualities and character into account (he possessed none of the attributes of a "cultural leader"), it is perhaps fitting that we turn our attention to the fact that he was *not* actually a typical representative of modern Yiddish literary culture. Even though he grew up in the heart of this culture during the peak of its development in Poland, in the period between the two World Wars, he remained a stranger and an oddity within it. This, and not just the almost insane personal envy, might be the reason for the suspicion and even aversion with which he was held by the Yiddishist establishment.

In its essence, the difference between Bashevis' work and the whole of the modern Yiddish literary corpus (apart from a few very narrow and marginal segments of it) reveals itself in one crucial aspect. Bashevis approached the act of literary creation with a base-experience of underlying awareness that falls under the sign of fatalism and nihilism. Human existence and, certainly, Jewish existence appeared to him suffused with evil and suffering, torn apart from within by internal conflicts that cannot be resolved, pervaded by an absurdity both comical and tragic. Moreover, he was convinced that any organized effort to correct and improve man's lot, any will to guide it towards some "salvation" according to an ideological-eschatological program, was doomed to failure. Not only would such efforts fail to right life's wrongs, they would even increase the suffering and evil to the point of holocaust. Bashevis "understood" the twentieth century as an age in which a suffering humanity was forced to follow lethal ideological-eschatological agendas which gave birth to a murderousness unequaled in viciousness and horror by any evil known to man throughout all of history. He was opposed with all his heart (and even that without pathos and with the awareness that opposition itself was hopeless) to any eschatological human organization and especially Soviet and international Communism, and almost to the same degree any Jewish eschatological movement such as Zionism, national socialism (the *Bund*), etc. The only spiritual position that he accepted was passive-fatalistic. By adopting this stance a person might achieve a certain "saintliness," to the degree that he or she gives up from the very start any attempt to control his or her own destiny, let alone that of others, and this out of the aware-

ness of the moral superiority of surrender over initiative or over the desire to steer the course of events in the “desired” direction. Bashevis’ “saint” is the “fool” who is not a fool at all. Gimpel the Fool, the hero of his early story of the same name, that, in its superb English translation by Saul Bellow, opened for Bashevis the door through which he could address the American and international audiences and capture their hearts, is in the framework of the Bashevian story-telling art, the most complete human being. He is not the fool that those who exploit him throughout his entire life believe him to be. He sees through their lies. He knows of their malice towards him. He knows that his wife is deceiving him and that his children are not of his seed. He knows full well that he has always been cheated and exploited in everything, yet he accepts this state of affairs in his awareness that any response on his part would only serve to increase the wickedness and suffering.

In the eyes of Bashevis, Gimpel is the archetypal Jew, just as he is the embodiment of the Yiddish language — a language with no territory, no protection, no cultural-political alliances, no prestige and no army or any military terminology — the language of the weak, the victims. It is as a representative of *this* Yiddish and its speakers that Bashevis trod the paths of the modern world of power-struggles and protest, the world of the demanders of rights and the “discrimination-gruntled.” As such an emissary he reached Stockholm to receive the Nobel prize for literature and, likewise, he arrived in Israel for his famous conversation with Menachem Begin, in which he demonstrated to the prime-minister how ridiculous military pomp would be if it were carried out in Yiddish. Neither Begin nor the Israeli public caught on that, in his ironic-humorous way, Bashevis was expressing his reservations towards Israel as an authentic Jewish entity, as though he were saying: A real, authentic Jew who thinks and behaves as you do, my dear Israeli friends, is nothing but a joke, an incongruity, a Yeshiva-Boher brandishing a sword and clutching a general’s staff as if it were a broom-stick.

This moral and philosophical position (not, however, the opposition to Zionism itself) was utterly alien to the mainstream of the new Yiddish literature. Like much of modern Jewish culture, the central tradition of Yiddish literature had sprung out of the opposition to what appeared to be the inertia and passivity of the old, traditional Jewish way of life. This is not the forum for a deliberation of the degree of truth in the claims made over the last two-hundred years against Jewish inertia and passivity. Modern Jewish culture and the new Yiddish literature as a whole operated under the assumption that the Jewish people, who had for centuries refused to take an active part in the formation of history, and had thus relegated themselves to the passive position in its most extreme sense (the position of the victim), must break out of their national passivity. To achieve this they must also abandon their static adherence to the religious-halakhic tradition, to which they clung in their effort to preserve their dis-

tinctiveness and exclusiveness and to worship their God (their only *desiderati*). This new culture and literature asserted that the Jewish nation must open its world to humanistic ideas that place man, his values, qualities and needs, at the center of life and culture: ideas that point towards ways of attending to these needs while improving man's qualities and realizing the positive potential hidden in the "human condition."

Modern Jewish culture demanded that the people of Israel apprehend life through the lens of humanism, and by this willful act of comprehension break through to the heart of historical becoming. It hoped for the awakening of a national will ("Awake my people, how long will you slumber?"), recommended activity, vigor, readiness to struggle and effort to change. Yiddish literature endorsed these recommendations with the best of its talents, all of its earthy vivacity and all of the immediacy of its contact with the Jewish masses. When Yiddish literature sprang from the ideological soil of the Enlightenment (*Haskalah*) in the nineteenth century, or when it reflected, at the turn of the century, the birth of modern Jewish nationalism, or when it played a central role, later in the twentieth century, in the burgeoning Jewish socialist movements, its call to the Jewish people was a call for change and awakening. The voice of this call was not mitigated even when this literature appeared to be clinging with nostalgia to the popular-traditional Jewish milieu with its religio-cultural underpinnings and its colorful folklore which had already acquired an "exotic" flavor, as it were. It can be shown that Y.L. Peretz's hassidic tales and folk-like-legends, for example, not only infuse the pseudo-folk narrative material with modern humanist referents, but also cast doubts upon the validity of the traditional culture that they presumed to represent or duplicate, and even undermine it. The call of Yiddish literature was not just against halakhic-religious rule and the control which it exerted over every aspect of Jewish life, or against hassidic supernaturalism (although these did inform a major part of its message throughout the nineteenth century); it was primarily directed against the passivity, weakness, inertia, and stagnation that encumbered any process of awakening or overcoming.

Into this cultural continuity, that cast its lot with change, will-power and "the courage to transform," entered Isaac Bashevis Singer, bringing with him both as innate qualities and as a fully developed world view, a deep distrust in human will-power and an absolute aversion for both the Nietzschean "will to power" and the liberal faith in "progress." He brought an aversion to any overly vigorous human activity — individual and even more so collective, national or class activity. He was suspicious of the motives of such activity and predicted catastrophic results for it. He didn't believe that penetration into the "heart of history," which was nothing more than the heart of a dark and murderous power struggle, would bring the people of Israel any profit, let alone relief. He was willing to accept — and this is very rare in both modern Yiddish literature and its Hebrew counterpart — complete passivity. Y.L. Peretz wrote the story

“Bontshe Shweig” as a bitter satire on Jewish passivity, although it has also been given a sentimental, non-satiric interpretation in the service of which editors of readers and anthologies have seen fit to excise parts of the original text. (When Bontshe reaches the after-life and the heavenly court of justice offers him all the luxuries of the earth and the heavens, he is content to have a buttered roll.) Bashevis, however, took Bontshe to his heart, relieved him of his intellectual numbness, and transformed him into Gimpel the Fool. He accepted Bontshe’s attitude as a moral and Jewish stance; he refused to accept Peretz’s derision.

Sholem Aleichem, in his marvelous monologues (including the series of Tevye’s monologues), presented archetypes of Jewish passivity: men and women in the gravest distress who experience terrible trials and are unable to envision a way of extricating themselves from their hellish situation, other than the act embodied in the telling of their tribulations in rich and digressive speech, a narration that advances in a nervous and absurd zigzag motion that, in itself, reveals the pattern of the scuttling from wall to wall of the prisoner who knows not how to break through his prison-walls. The great author’s criticism lay in this very rhythm, arising from the words of geese-herdresses and Yeshiva-students still sitting at their in-laws’ table, Jews who had supposedly won the lottery, or, on the contrary, Jews who had been “burned” and are suspected of having themselves acted out the blessing “*Barukh borei me’orei ha’esh*” (Blessed be the Creator of the fiery lights). Out of these frenzied monologues rises a cry that even the juciest humor cannot conceal; a cry that calls, without the speaker’s awareness, for change, for salvation. Bashevis, who in many respects carried on Sholem Aleichem’s great art of the monologue to achievements that do not fall short of those of the creator of the model, also presented, in tens of monologues, situations of great distress, but deprived them utterly of the nervous, tortured rhythm, of the hopeless internal scrambling. In Bashevis’ monologues the flow of speech is the tempestuous or relaxed flow of the human soul that is carried upon the waves of a current over which it has no control. The demons, great and small, that often make their voices heard in these monologues, are none other than expressions of the speaker’s awareness that his or her attempt to fight the current will not end successfully. Bashevis’ monologues are, in this respect, not just a continuation of Sholem-Aleichem’s monologues but, also, their inversion.

There is a certain proximity between Bashevis and Agnon (reflected in the elegant insights that Bashevis made in his article on Agnon that was published in *The New York Times* on the occasion of Agnon’s receiving the Nobel prize for literature, together with Nelly Sachs). Agnon’s love is given wholly to the lost man, the cornered individual who is passive and inarticulate, the victim of cruel manipulation at the hands of his environment, who is carried, willy-nilly, upon the waves of historical developments. He, too, in fact, introduced into Jewish literature the figure of the

“fool” who is no fool, but is no resounding intellectual either. There is an intimate proximity between some of Bashevis’ folk-heroes and Agnon’s Ovadiah the Cripple, or between his most educated and aware heroes and Hershel Horovitz from Agnon’s *A Simple Story* or Yitzhak Kummer from *Yesteryear*. The similarity is, however, limited and, actually, superficial. Agnon’s work is shaped entirely by the powerful tension between a Zionist-religious belief in salvation and a dark, bitter, chilling disappointment in the heavenly order of the world and the slim chances that the people of Israel have of survival in the framework of this order. Agnon’s passive heroes are tragic in the sense that, in the possible framework of a “correct” world order, their passivity would be appropriate and would produce no ill effects. The “wheel of time” that rolled off its axle is the force that crushes Agnon’s heroes. Accordingly, if the Zionist effort were to bridge the pernicious rift between salvation and the savior (according to Agnon the world of the second *aliyah* was split into two groups: those who struggle for salvation but are estranged from God the savior, and those who attach themselves to the savior yet refuse to lift a finger for the sake of salvation), Yitzhak Kummer could have found his place between Jaffa and Jerusalem and would not have died insane. If the Jewish community that is described in *A Simple Story* were not dissociated both from the spirituality of authentic faith and from modern humanistic endeavor (and not devoted solely to provincial materialism), Hershel could have found a cure for his suffering either in the strength of religious faith or in the realization of his romantic love for Bluma — and would not have become, at the end of the story, a shell of a human fly that a spider has sucked dry of all vitality.

In Bashevis’ work, on the contrary, passivity is not the result of a malfunction in the social or the cosmic mechanism; rather, it is the only correct stance in the face of the essential order (or disorder) of things, be they what they may, always and everywhere. Chaos is in a superior position everywhere. It engulfs man in tidal waves from without (historical events) and from within (lusts, perversities of character, internal conflicts, and unexplained distortions in the existential flow of the psyche). The conscious man (like the hero of *The Moskat Family*) faces reality and himself while gripped by boundless terror and curiosity. He knows full well that he can control neither himself nor his environment. He is bound to commit every possible blunder to which external circumstances and his own incomprehensible lusts and desires drive him. No rational life-plan of his will ever reach fruition; in all his actions he will always be swept, led, and discharged further and further towards some unclear goal determined by an unknown force; and, like that hero, Yehoshua Heshel Banet, so the rich and influential Moskat family and the whole of Polish Jewry, in their journey towards extinction.

In many of Bashevis’ novels and stories, this basic feature repeats itself: a person watches, as if from afar, his own existence driven by forces

which he does not recognize or by wild currents that he cannot fathom. While, objectively, this person participates fully in the destructive activity which brings about his downfall, his subjective sense of existence is passive and semi-detached. Often, the author introduces some tragic occurrence which supposedly explains this separation between the objective and subjective “I,” such as the death of Arturo, Max Barabander’s only son in *Scum*, or the loss of Herman Broder’s entire past (as a result of his experiences during World War II) in *Enemies — A Love Story*. However, this does not mean that Bashevis regards passivity and the paralysis of the will as characteristic of a certain type of person or as a result of a specific set of circumstances. Rather, the people who react this way to loss and bereavement, as Barabander and Broder do, represent for him the human norm.

Here, by the way, is the place to comment on the sexuality in Bashevis’ stories which won him so many denunciations (the Yiddish critics could not swallow it, and some saw it as an intentional sully of Jewish life by an author who was libeling his own people), and was thought of as the spice by which Bashevis contrived to “sell” his wares to his millions of readers. This last claim is, of course, utter hogwash. Explicit and implicit sexuality can be found in the works of hundreds of writers of whom only a handful achieved true popularity; sex itself has yet to sell a single scrap of paper outside of the prescribed and highly specific domain of the pornography industry and its audience. At any rate, even the presentation of sexuality in Bashevis’ stories is entirely different from its presentation in the whole tradition of modern Jewish literature. In this tradition, sexuality appears — usually in a positive role — as the representative of an oppressed vitality, of an internal libidinal energy, individual and national, that was repressed by an ascetic culture and now, with the relaxing of that culture’s norms, is capable of bursting out and realizing itself not just via pure sexuality, but also through a whole system of earthly and human pathways of vitality — even national, sovereign vitality. For Bashevis, sexuality is none other than that absurd force that pulsates within the human body and mind, and exerts its maddening influence which is intended to break apart any order in life, any logic and any rational intentionality. Humankind is subjugated by sexuality as it is subjugated by historical events.

Singer’s attitude towards sex is actually compatible, up to a point, with that of traditional religious puritanism, which identifies the sexual drive with the disruptive presence of Satan. However, whereas the religious tradition demands, if not complete repression, at least a channeling and controlling of sexual drives, Bashevis, in his fatalistic way, does not believe that such measures are possible. Accordingly, even in his stories that are set in traditional Jewish society, many of the characters are completely overwhelmed by their sexual instincts. His work is completely devoid of any moral imperative of continence, as it is devoid of didacticism.

Indeed, the halakhic code did make an heroic effort to assist Jews in

conquering their sexuality and in ruling their lives by a transcendental and spiritual logic. This struggle, in Bashevis' view, was lost from the beginning, and became hopeless as historical events utterly undermined the power of the religious code. The demons had always haunted the abandoned cellars and attics of the Jewish psyche. With boundless cunning, patience, wisdom, humor, with threats and temptations, they diverted this psyche from its proper path. Now that the psyche has been all but murdered and hardly exists in the world, the demons remain, lonely and wretched, in the crumbling attics of the ruined homes of Israel. Together with the Yiddish language, they are fading away, becoming transparent, spiritual, ephemeral beings, melting into nothingness.

The sober, self-aware man in Bashevis' works, both those that unfold against an East-European background and those that take place in America (particularly in the American book of memoirs and, also, to a certain degree, the novel, *Enemies*) — this man is thrown about, surprised, from wave to wave like driftwood from a shipwreck on stormy seas. Each time he is taken by surprise anew, even though he knows that anything is possible in this existence of his. His only recourse is to wonder at the world and about the meaning of the will of "God," if such a one exists. He is distinguished by his power of memory, but his memories can neither guide nor teach him; they can only torture his soul. Often, the intellectual point of departure of the Bashevian protagonist is the teaching of Spinoza that interprets human existence and nature alike as expressions of the will and presence of God. This was the most logical philosophy for someone who had just emerged from the world of religious tradition. The typical Yeshiva student, having lost his faith in a personal God, clutches at the compromise of pantheism. The life experience of the Bashevian protagonist, however, completely negates Spinozian optimism. It points, rather, at an existence devoid of all will or directed divine presence. Thus, a kind of philosophical debate is built into the stories; but, the Spinozan way of thinking does not really represent in this dispute a positive or even possible alternative. It merely constitutes a connecting link between the guileless religious faith that the traditional Jew carries over from the past and the absurd existential amazement that envelops him in the present. Furthermore, it acts as a foil to emphasize this absurdity. The amazement is existential, but not existentialist. A vast distance separates the belief in the Camusian "rebel," the existential absurdity, or the Sartrean necessity of choice and commitment in the face of existential meaninglessness, from the Bashevian view of a human existence that runs from birth without will to a death without choice.

* * *

Bashevis began creating in the late Twenties and early Thirties, in a Poland squeezed between the U.S.S.R. and Nazi Germany. The political and social horizon appeared grim and the future of Polish Jewry, particularly after the closing of the American doors to mass immigration in

1924, appeared very grim, indeed. It was clear that this great Jewry, although much of it had undergone processes of modernization that had unleashed tremendous creative forces, was walking a dead-end street, that its fate was catastrophical (although no one dared imagine the utter destruction that it underwent during World War II). Caught in an ever-tightening economic stranglehold, exposed to hatred that periodically exploded in the form of pogroms and murders, discriminated against in every possible way, in fact, locked into a country that bore it only malice — this Jewry, with its deep historical roots and richly diverse traditional and modern culture, existed in a state of constant pressure and depression. There were those who announced the way out of the siege: the Communists (the best of the Jewish youth flocked to them) pointed towards the revolution that would negate the class structure of society and, together with it, presumably, the “Jewish Question;” the Bundists called for a struggle “here” on the historical raising-ground of Polish Jewry in the name of socialism and national Jewish and Yiddish distinctness; the Zionists spoke Hebrew and pointed out the way to Eretz-Yisrael, even though the crisis of the third and fourth *aliyot*, together with the immigration limitations declared by the British in the Thirties, precluded the possibility of a Jewish evacuation of Poland to Israel.

Bashevis absorbed the grim despair of stress-burdened Polish Jewry, but he didn’t “buy” any of the popularly disseminated “solutions.” He lived in an atmosphere similar to that described in Agnon’s “A Guest for the Night,” but he lacked the eschatological-Zionist perspective that informs the Agnonic novel, and that situates its deep gloom in the context of a “positive” perspective. Bashevis picked up mostly the feeling of no-way-out, of being swept away by a grim and uncontrollable current towards a catastrophic future.

He gave this feeling powerful expression even in his first novel, *Satan in Goray*, a masterpiece of stylization and dramatic symbolization that, even today, it seems, is still his most concentrated, coherent and complete work in the genre of the novel. Going back through history, as it were, to the days of Shabtai Zvi, Bashevis described the wretchedness of Polish Jewry after the Chmelnitsky massacres, its spiritual and physical collapse, the terrible fears that haunted its conscious and subconscious. On the background of these sorrows, the old rabbi tries in vain to reinstate the rule of rabbinical law over the congregation of Goray, this law being the only shield of historical Jewish life.

The crisis breaks out in his own home. Belief in Shabtai Zvi, the false messiah, gains a foothold in his family, and the expectation of the imminent arrival of the messiah soon engulfs the entire town. For a while, the reality of the town becomes a wondrously harmonic, messianic reality. The town is unified and happy. It is led by an authoritative man who radiates charismatic sexual vigor, prepares the town, as it were, for the arrival of the messiah, and has intercourse with the “prophetess,” Rachel,

a physically deformed and terrified young woman who had been married to an impotent Kabbalist and became a hearer of voices and seer of visions. In truth, however, it is Satan who takes over the Jews of Goray, the Satan of false salvation, and only now, not in the days of Chmelnitsky, does the town approach its complete disintegration. The disappointment of the false messiah who converted to Islam breaks the strength of the town and it can no longer face its pain. The destiny of the town is mirrored in that of Rachel: she is recognized as being possessed by a Satanic “dybbuk,” and she dies at the moment that her “dybbuk” is supposedly exorcized by means of consecrations. The criticism of the novel points primarily to the Communist promise of salvation and Stalin’s seductive charisma, but it protests, in fact, against all human and Jewish eschatological hopes. The novel can be compared to the play, *The End of Days*, by Haim Hazaz on the one hand (written during the same period), and the famous prologue of *The Jews of Zierndorf*, the work by Jakob Wasserman, on the other.

Hazaz’s play and Wasserman’s prose-poem describe, as does *Satan in Goray*, the tremendous excitement that, like fire, seizes the ancient and long suffering Jewish-Ashkenazi community when news of the coming messianic salvation breaks. These pieces also end with the destruction of the Jewish town — in “The End of Days” with the actual burning of the town by the messiah’s emissary, Yuspa. This comes out of the assumption that, as long as the exilic condition remains, Jews will cling to it, and that only a complete dissolution of this condition can bring about salvation. In *The Jews of Zierndorf* the entire community of the town of Fürth sets out on a so-called journey to Eretz Yisrael, but this journey turns quickly into a disaster that finishes off most of the community. In both pieces, at any rate, destruction is accompanied by a vision of renewed integration. In Hazaz’s play it is the vision of Zionist salvation, in Wasserman’s work the vision is of Jewish integration within a “prophetic,” liberal European culture as embodied in the figure of the half-Jew, Agathon (the hero) and in the village of Zierndorf, which was founded by the survivors of the Fürth Jews who had set out on their false messianic journey. Bashevis, however, is unique in that, in his novel, destruction is not followed by any vision of, or direction towards, a possible salvation. *Satan in Goray* ends in the author’s “escape” to the stylized texts of traditional “dybbuk” stories, but this, nevertheless, holds no hint of a return to a naive, folkloristic religious faith.

Satan in Goray is still the best key to understanding the Bashevian grasp of reality, according to which the sufferings of humanity are solemn truth but its “salvations” are compete lies. *Satan in Goray* is also a key to the stylistic qualities of Bashevis’ work, for his world view bears unique poetic and stylistic results that achieve their full development even in his debut novel. His fatalism finds its expression in an opposition to any structural or syntactic complication of the continuity of the story. Since no event or gesture has the power to change the course of events, there is no

point in describing them with tangled structures and complex sentences that, by their very hypotactic quality, confer primary significance onto others. Everything can be expressed in simple sentences that follow each other in the either loosely or tightly knit flow of the story "as it is." Likewise, there is no point in splitting hairs or piling on relations of cause and effect or precedence and antecedence. It is better to put the events down on paper as they are in their finality and arbitrariness in a free-flowing and evenly rhythmized narrative sequence. Thus, Bashevis brought the modern Yiddish narrative back from the superlative structural and syntactical complexity of writers like Dovid Bergelson and from the self-aware stylistic and structural virtuosity of maestros like Der Nister and Moshe Kulbak, to some sort of basic, epic simplicity. It would seem that one can hear in this narrative yet again and with great force the voice of the "naive" narrator, who treats every event with respect and unfolds before the reader event after event, apparently of equal significance, in a single, moderate tone, accepting everything, knowing everything, wondering at everything, resigning itself to everything. This so-called naiveté is actually the understanding that no sophistication can explain a baffling reality, and that the gesture of sophistication is superbly naive.

There can be no doubt that this simple, basic story-telling tone, when it is applied to a universe full of conflicts and complexities, is one of the secrets of the spell that Bashevis' stories cast over millions of readers, and it goes a certain way towards explaining the ability of these stories to live a full life in translation. In spite of its untranslatable, idiomatic juiciness, Bashevis' Yiddish demands of the translator primarily a responsiveness to the feeling of basic narrativity that is actually embodied in the rolling of simple sentences one after the other. The sensitive translator need only revive in his heart the epic, rhythmic sequence of the folk-like tale in his own idiom and he immediately comes upon the recipe that enables a living duplication of the Bashevian narrative charm.

* * *

This is the place to bring up another point regarding the tremendous popularity of Bashevis' stories as the creations of a Jewish identity that is exotic, fascinating, alien, and seductive. We are forced to ask ourselves whether it is merely by chance that the great author who presents the historical Jewish identity as passive and victimized is the one who captured the hearts of so many non-Jewish readers. In posing this question I have no intention of belittling the virtues of Bashevis' work at its best, and yet it seems that these virtues are accompanied by a certain "weakness" that the non-Jewish reader seems particularly comfortable with. It is no accident that the view of the human condition that the non-Jewish world absorbs from Jewish culture comes mostly from a passive vantage point; the common denominator of passivity encompasses a broad spectrum of Jewish culture, from Kafka's "Metamorphosis" to "Fiddler on the Roof," supposedly after Sholem Aleichem's "Tevye" cycle. In the eyes of the non-

Jewish world, it seems, Bashevis is not just a marvelous story-teller, but, also, some kind of wandering Jew, a modern Ahasuerus whose terrible destiny (the curse of Jesus) drives him on his endless journey and drags him through strange and wild experiences and events — all of them out of the realm of his control.

In this respect we can expect a certain degree of understanding of Bashevis, though uncomfortable and not as accepting as that of the “Goyim,” by the Israeli and Zionist readership. It is doubtful, however, whether we can accept Bashevis’ gospel which preaches surrender, being swept away, paralysis in the face of extinction, as basic truths — although, in the heat of our naive faith in our power to control our destiny, perhaps we should keep this truth in mind and accept something of its coolness and melancholy.

Nevertheless, it is impossible not to be enraptured by Bashevis’ narrative art, not to be drawn into the melancholy and mystery of his fatalism, not to identify, if only for a moment, with the nihilistic undercurrents hidden by the deceptive simplicity of his narrative frameworks. All the same, we cannot wholeheartedly accept all of these. A substantial critique from a Jewish-Zionist vantage point will have to struggle with Bashevis’ work.

At any rate, it is clear that the best of his stories will live long literary lives — even though the author himself never thought of his work in terms of any literary-aesthetic immortality. Bashevis’ attitude towards literary creation was devoid of any pretense or mystification. He knew that he was a great artist, who tells stories better than most of the raconteurs of his generation. But this knowledge represented nothing more than excellence in a craft and not a spiritual virtue that can overcome time and the spiritual chaos of human existence; it is like the knowledge of a master carpenter who is sure that the object emerging from under his hand is more finely crafted and beautiful than any produced by another carpenter. Nevertheless, his pessimism was honest and real, and his fatalistic world view did not allow him to develop illusions about the timelessness of aesthetic achievement. He saw literature as a perishable thing, a human product given to destruction, wear, confusion, and insignificance, like any other product. Sometimes he made the appearance of viewing his craft in terms of mere *parnuseh* (livelihood). This was an ironic pretense, of course, under which, nonetheless, lay more than a grain of seriousness. There was no mistaking the look with which he would fix speakers and experts who extolled his works in public, composed orations about them, split hairs, and generally waxed verbose. Reflected in his blue-green eyes was a combination of derision and pity. Theirs was, once again, the particularly touching *naïveté* of the sophisticated in which Bashevis himself never took part. One can safely assume that this commemorative statement did not fully avoid the pitfalls of such *naïveté*. However, one hopes that it does retain some of the simplicity and straightforwardness of the master himself.

The Bible and Political Thought: Daniel J. Elazar's Contribution to the Jewish Political Tradition

HARVEY SHULMAN

FOR OVER THIRTY YEARS, DANIEL J. ELAZAR has studied and written on the Biblical political tradition. The Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, which he founded and over which he presides, groups a number of academics sharing a common belief in the specificity and centrality of a Jewish political tradition whose origins can be traced to the Bible. If we are able today to speak of a Jewish political tradition, distinct from Greek or "Judeo-Christian" conceptual formulations, it is primarily the consequence of Elazar's innovative and pioneering creative work. His insights and observations become even more compelling when juxtaposed to the frequent stereotypical reflections on Bible and the Jewish political tradition among many leading political scientists and social theorists.

The legal philosopher, Carl Friedrich, while acknowledging the seminal contribution of the Old Testament to Western civilization's understanding of law, still describes it in terms of "sanctimonious" and "pharisaism," adding that "no sharper contrast can be imagined than the beatitudes of the Sermon of the Mount and the Curses of the Old Testament."¹ Eric Voegelin, in his discussion of prophecy, states that "the prophets were about to relegate Israel to a dead past by transferring the Kingdom of God into a new dawn on the horizon."² To Herbert Muller, "hardly any thinker will deny that the religion of Jesus is loftier than that of Moloch."³ One of the earliest examinations of the Bible and political theory states that "legalism finally triumphed over righteousness in official Judaism after the Exile and in the days of Jesus."⁴ Regarding the relevance of distinctive Jewish commentaries on the Bi-

1. Carl Joachim Friedrich, *The Philosophy of Law in Historical Perspective*, second edition, revised and enlarged (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 10.

2. Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, 6 vols., *Israel and Revelation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1956), vol. 1, p. 430.

3. Herbert J. Muller, *The Uses of the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 68.

4. Paul Ramsey, "Elements of a Biblical Political Theory," *Journal of Religion* (vol. XXIX, 1949): 278.

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ble, the noted nineteenth-century Bible scholar, Julius Wellhausen, contemptuously dismissed Midrash as "the consequence of the conservatism of all the relics of antiquity, a wholly particular artificial reawakening of dry bones . . ." ⁵ He stated that "what importance the written letter, the book of the law, possessed for the Jews, we all know from the New Testament." ⁶ Talmud and Midrash are seldom consulted. For Harry Orlinsky, "such a procedure is tantamount to utilizing only the rabbinic sources for a study of the New Testament period in the Greco-Roman world!" ⁷

A brief perusal of some classic political theory texts illustrates the bias which informs twentieth-century reflections on Biblical Jewish political thought. Gaetano Mosca begins his study of political thought with Egypt, Babylonia, and the social and political attributes of Confucianism and Buddhism. He acknowledges "the rich Hebrew literature" and the importance of the Biblical idea of monarchy and prophecy [in one page ⁸]. Charles Howard McIlwain states that "the early political history of the Jews is a subject of great importance for the history of political thought as a whole." He never, however, proceeds to discuss any aspect of the Jewish political tradition, except to describe it generally as "purely theocratic." ⁹ Lee Cameron McDonald's only reference to Judaic content is to say that it is mythological, and to indicate that "Moses, Solon and Romulus are the great political founders." ¹⁰ John Bowle is one of the few political theorists who begins Western civilization prior to the traditionally-ascribed Greek origins. In his chapter, "The Temple State and the Sacred City: Middle Eastern Empire," he discusses bureaucracy, law, and monarchy, elaborates on Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Assyria, but never acknowledges the Bible or the existence of the Hebrews. ¹¹ Amazingly, one scholar, J.B. Bury, completed an entire book, *The Idea of Progress*, and found nothing to say about the importance of the Bible and the Judaic contribution to this central Western idea. ¹² Several other political theory texts simply ignore the Judaic and Biblical heritage. ¹³

5. Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, with a preface by W. Robertson Smith (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Meridian Books Library Edition, 1973), p. 227.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 392.

7. Harry M. Orlinsky, "The Septuagint: The Oldest Translation," *Essays in Biblical Culture and Bible Translation* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1974), pp. 380-381.

8. Gaetano Mosca, *A Short History of Political Philosophy*, translated by Sondra Z. Koff (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1972), p. 11.

9. Charles Howard McIlwain, *The Growth of Political Thought in the West* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), p. 147.

10. Lee Cameron McDonald, *The Western Political Theory* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1968), p.1.

11. John Bowle, *Western Political Thought* (London: Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1961), pp. 15-131.

12. J.B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress* (New York: Dover Publications, 1960), *passim*.

13. These texts include George H. Sabine and T.L. Thorson, *A History of Political Phi-*

Leo Strauss, capable of precise and skilled Biblical analysis, and familiar with the entire range of Jewish thought, including Maimonides, did not see the Bible as appropriate subject-matter for political philosophy. He does, however, distinguish between political philosophy and political thought,¹⁴ the latter being coeval with life and able to incorporate the study of Judaic texts.

I am not about to suggest that the Bible and the Talmud are political theory texts, or that they deal systematically with philosophy and political philosophy. However, the understanding of Biblical material from the perspective of political science can be defended on methodological grounds. If "political theory criticizes what is and constructs what should be,"¹⁵ or if its primary purpose is "education,"¹⁶ or if it can be understood "as moral, inclusive, philosophical and general," and not always systematic,¹⁷ the Bible should be a necessary and integral component in the study of political science.¹⁸

Elazar refines and "creates" a vocabulary through which he attempts to understand the Jewish political tradition.¹⁹ His approach is historical, analytical, and imaginative: He designs a framework which directs us to further comparative, empirical, and theoretical research. He organizes, integrates, and interprets an enormous amount of historical, political-legal, and theological information, so that a generation of political scientists interested in the Judaic political tradition can share and develop an area of discourse and research previously believed to be without specific political import. Elazar proceeds to the study of the Jewish political tradition by an examination of the documentary record, and of the constitutional framework and structure through which the

losophy, 4th edition (Hinsdale: Dryden Press, 1973); Phyllis Doyle, *A History of Political Thought* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1949) — some reference to Bible as it relates to Christianity; R.N. Berki, *The History of Political Thought* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1977); and Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960). As brilliant as Wolin's book is, he is still able to write that "prior to the development of Greek philosophy in the sixth century B.C., Man had thought of himself and of society as integral parts of nature, as subject to the same natural and supernatural forces. Nature, man, and society formed a continuum." (pp. 28, 29)

14. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, eds., *History of Political Philosophy* (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1964), p. 1.

15. Elizabeth M. James, *Political Theory: An Introduction to Interpretation* (Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing Company, 1976), p. 2.

16. Thomas P. Jenkins, *The Study of Political Theory* (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 2.

17. George Kateb, *Political Theory* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968), *passim*.

18. The contribution of Mulford Sibley to the study of the Judaic political tradition needs acknowledgment. His textbook on the history of political thought begins with the chapter "Politics and Ethics Among the Ancient Hebrews." Mulford Q. Sibley, *Political Ideas and Ideologies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pp. 11-29.

19. Daniel J. Elazar and Stuart P. Cohen, *The Jewish Polity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. 7-20.

actors raise and resolve political questions, determining recurring political and theo-political concerns which affect the polity.

The Jewish political tradition begins with the basic assumption that man is inclined to the possibilities of doing good or doing evil. Judaic thought rejects the Christian notion of Original Sin, and its relationship to, and potential effect on, the polity: man is expected to exercise his free will and his capacity to develop. The "world" is not to be approached passively or with resignation, but to be confronted vigorously, through action, so that man can control (rather than be required to submit) to what Machiavelli would call *fortuna*. In Judaic thought, God and man share a partnership in the pursuit of that which is ennobling, and that which affirms man's dignity and worth.

The Biblical narrative tells us that God created man to be free and "man, in turn, must learn to be reconciled to the need to exercise that freedom in harmony with the universal power that makes for his salvation."²⁰ Man must adjust to the reality that not everything is permissible, and that God, short of again destroying the world, must come to terms with man's imperfections and his recurring ill-considered judgments. Elazar points out that man is to consent to God's beckoning ("hearken"): man is not expected to react submissively to authoritative commands without the exercise of free will.²¹ It is through God's covenant²² with man that liberty is preserved and, within this framework, both his free will and his obligations continue to be mutually essential, even if they are not always in harmonious co-existence.

Elazar states that

the Jewish political tradition, like every political tradition, is concerned with power and justice; it differs from the political traditions growing out of classic Greek thought since it begins with a concern for relationships instead of regimes. It is less concerned with determining the best form of Government (in Aristotelian terms, the best constitution) than with

20. Daniel J. Elazar, "The Covenant Idea in Politics," Working Paper No. 22 (Jerusalem: Center for Jewish Community Studies, 1983), part II, p. 8.

21. Ibid., pp. 11-13, 14.

22. A covenant is identified and characterized by "a prologue indicating the parties involved, a preamble setting the general purposes of the covenant and the principles behind it, a body of conditions and operative clauses, a stipulation of the agreed upon sanctions to be applied if the covenant were violated, and an oath to make the covenant morally binding." Elazar, "The Covenant Idea in Politics," pp. 1-5. In addition, "A covenant is a morally informed agreement or pact between people or parties having an independent or sufficiently equal status based on voluntary consent and established by mutual oath or promises witnessed by the relevant higher authority. A covenant provides for joint action or obligation to achieve defined ends (limited or comprehensive) under conditions of mutual respect, which protect the individual integrities of all the parties to it. Every covenant involves consenting, promising and agreeing. Most are meant to be of unlimited duration, if not perpetual." Elazar, "Covenant and Freedom in the Jewish Political Tradition," Annual Sol Finestone Lecture (Philadelphia: Graetz College, March 18, 1981), p. 4.

establishing the proper relationships between the governors and the governed, power and justice, God and man.²³

Elazar notes that one cannot understand the Biblical political tradition in terms of a contemporary vision of "private and public," applied to institutions three millennia old. The administrative implementation of power and authority, how and through what political instrumentalities political rule was carried out, are generally unknown. What Elazar can show with some certitude, however, is "that the fundamental principles animating government and politics in ancient Israel were theocratic, federal and republican."²⁴

The Biblical narrative directs the Hebrew people to build a polity on earth which would rule justly and equitably. The Biblical understanding and use of history, intellectually honest, is persuasive, because it is morally prescriptive. The retrieval of an ancient Judaic political tradition is complicated by the fact that no corpus of literature exists under this rubric. One must engage in, and adapt, midrashic-exegetical techniques to elicit political implications from theological texts. In Judaic thought, the narrative is largely about time, process, and change, while Greek thought is frequently about the aesthetization of politics.

For Elazar, the arts were used "to distract people from moral concerns, hoping that cultivation of aesthetics would so preoccupy them that they would not be concerned over the lack of justice in the society around them."²⁵ His purpose is not to denigrate the arts, but to caution against aesthetics or science becoming "false gods," instead of means to a "good life." Barbarism and paganism are seen as the consequences of a social order which cannot formulate notions of good and evil, right or wrong. In the guise of abstract notions of liberty and individualism, we move inexorably to a theoretical social order where we are unable to discriminate: complete toleration is not necessarily conducive to a moral order and, in the completely free market, what suffers is the important ability to choose what is higher and purposeful, over that which demeans and diminishes humanity.

The ancient Israelites instituted government to implement God's general design for man. Their "state" is not the modern state: it is not identical with the Greek *polis* in that the "city" alone could not embody man's highest telos. The "state" is understood as a series of partnerships between man and man, and man and God. Monarchical rule is often opposed by the people because it is seen to violate God's cov-

23. Daniel J. Elazar, "Introduction," *Kinship and Consent*, ed. by Daniel J. Elazar (Ramat Gan: Turtledove Publishing, 1981), p. 4.

24. Daniel J. Elazar, *Government in Biblical Israel* (Jerusalem: Center For Jewish Community Studies, 1973), pp. 117-118.

25. Elazar, "Toward a Meaningful World Covenant," *Reconstructionist* (September 17, 1971): 16.

enantal sovereignty. But their consent is a crucial element of a state's legitimacy. Elazar's attempt to retrieve the Jewish political tradition from its earliest origins is not designed to romanticize an ancient archaic past, but to shed light on an ancient and vital Judaic political heritage. This Judaic tradition points to "a covenanted world order composed of covenanted communities."²⁶

The covenant (*brit*) is a compact in which the contracting parties, not necessarily fully equal, are independent. The essential characteristic of this *brit* is the establishment of a series of mutual obligations which exceed traditional contractual entailments because they demand loyalty, mutuality, and moral imperatives beyond that of the pursuit of personal advantage. The Judaic political tradition cannot be understood as narrowly legalistic. The "letter of the law" is superseded by the important Jewish concept of *hesed*, which is often erroneously defined as grace, or covenant-love. To Elazar, *hesed* is best understood as:

the obligation of a partner to a covenant to go beyond the narrowly constructed contractual demands of the partnership in order to make the relationship between them a truly viable one . . . Through it, Jewish tradition interprets one's contractual obligations broadly rather than narrowly, the broader the better . . . A *brit* without *hesed* is indeed a narrow thing and, according to Jewish tradition, God himself provides the model of the extension of *hesed* by maintaining His relationship with Israel despite the Jews' repeated violations of the terms of the covenant.²⁷

This covenant extends into all aspects of man's existence and behavior.

To Elazar, the covenant is a "theo-political" concept. It is about the pursuit of moral aims through the exercise of political power, and is legitimated by public consent. Its essential political, cultural, and psychological attributes emerge out of the historical experiences of the Jewish people. The covenantal idea, above all, is about Jewish civilization. The covenant is to be renewed periodically, and is normally a harbinger of fundamental theological-constitutional transitions, such as the establishment of tribal authority structures, or monarchical rule. The covenantal characteristic of Judaic political thought is both immanent and transcendent, actual and potential: its relevance as a concept is theoretical and practical. Elazar states that:

a covenant-based politics is not simply a symbolic matter; it has to do with very concrete demands for power-sharing and the development of institutionalized forms and processes for doing so . . . It should be understood from the first that the covenant has consistently manifested itself on three levels: the intellectual, the cultural, and the operational.²⁸

The covenant's importance to Judaic political thought corresponds to the centrality of the concepts of natural right and natural law in

26. Ibid., p. 17.

27. Elazar, "Covenant, as the Basis of the Jewish Political Tradition," Center for Jewish Community Studies, 1977, p. 29.

28. Ibid., p. 10.

Western political thought.* Perhaps the most important element of covenantal-consciousness in Elazar's formulation is

the way it informs culture, especially political culture, endowing particular peoples with a particular set of political perceptions, expectations, and norms, and shaping the way in which those perceptions, expectations and norms are given institutional embodiment and behavioral expression.²⁹

The Jewish political tradition begins with the idea that only God is sovereign, while man exercises delegated temporal authority. Although the covenantal tradition is not exclusively theological, one must read with discernment and precision to formulate and separate political questions from sacred texts. The elaboration of a specifically Jewish political tradition will involve a comparative study of the various Biblical covenants to ascertain whether there exists one or several political traditions. We should not expect to find here an elaboration of a systematic political doctrine espousing the best political *polis* or regime; rather, political topics are discussed, such as the merging and sharing of power, individual and community rights and obligations, and sovereignty.

That only God is sovereign, and man exercises delegated temporal authority, does not mean that man is passive and submissive. On the contrary, man must continually strive to fulfill the ethical and normative imperatives inherent in a covenantal relationship. It does mean, however, that although man is linked with God in a partnership (as a junior partner, so to speak), man cannot assert his individualism to the extent that he becomes an end to himself. To paraphrase Montesquieu — man is free to do what he ought to do, and not to do what he ought not to do. Pluralism exists in Judaic political thought, but it has to be linked with a concept of obligation: no individual Jew, or community, is entirely sovereign. The political implications of covenantal politics serve to undermine the legitimacy of tyrants who would act as if they were free of obligation to a higher law.

This theory of governance is part of the tradition of "*ketarim*" (crowns), whereby the prophet, the priest and the temporal ruler share power. The origin of this unique theo-political arrangement is evident in the earliest Biblical narrative of the Sinaitic period, although the conceptual vocabulary and theoretical framework is traditionally understood to date from *Tannaitic* texts [Mishnah, *Avot* 4:13].

Briefly, this tripartite foundation of Jewish political thought encompasses the *keter torah* (the transmission of God's teachings), the *keter kehunnah* (the link between God and His community, established through its symbols and rituals), and the *keter malkhut* (the exercise of civil au-

* Although it is beyond the boundaries of this paper, it should be noted that covenantal ideas and practices are evident in a series of associational structures, from those put forward by seventeenth-century contract theorists to the founding principles of the American Declaration of Independence, and contemporary studies of Jewish communities.

29. Elazar, "The Covenant Idea in Politics," pp. 1-2,3.

thority). The distribution of authority among them is not fixed, nor is their political form, but the distinctiveness of all components is maintained, as well as their interdependence. Each component retains its own constitutional role and its own "hierarchy of officers" for the overall operation of the system to be considered legitimate. At times, the representatives of this tripartite division cooperate, at other times they are in conflict; at no time was one element totally excluded from political role.

Elazar's ordering of Jewish constitutional history, from the Biblical period to modernity, by studying the interaction among the "3 *ketarim*," illuminates a Judaic political tradition which was remarkably resilient, through all epochs. This longevity can be attributed to an institutional and structural adaptability of each "crown," all recognizing the legitimate existence of the others. Although the continuing functions of the "3 *ketarim*" are remarkably evident in all periods, a symmetrical, institutional infrastructure is not required. The *keter torah*'s constitutional relevance does not cease with the end of the age of prophecy. The prophet will be replaced by the scribe, to be followed by the sage, the rabbi, judge and teacher. And the *keter malkhut* will witness the cessation of the monarchy and its replacement by republican government.³⁰ It is worth noting that with assimilation and secularization, the *keter torah* and *keter kehunnah* are in danger of losing their importance, especially in the Diaspora and, ironically, the existence of a sovereign Jewish state greatly enhances the power of the *keter malkhut*, the civil authority, at the expense of the other "2 crowns."³¹

The roots of modern republicanism are to be found in the Bible. Political rule is never the private or exclusive preserve of one individual. It is intrinsically public, and this becomes increasingly evident when monarchical rule tends toward arbitrariness. It is during these periods that the prophetic presence becomes more important, and acts as a constitutional check on the development of political absolutism. When the monarchy is instituted, it is in response to the threat of the Philistines, and it does not destroy other, prior, associational forms. Indeed, it is with the rise of the "absolute monarch" that the ascendancy of prophetic influence, authority and opposition, is evident. The covenantal-federative principle becomes entrenched and fundamental to the Jewish political tradition:

Even after the Messiah comes, there will have to be a separation of powers,

30. Elazar and Cohen, *Jewish Polity*, pp. 16-20.

31. Daniel J. Elazar, *People and Polity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), p. 29. For additional documentation on the importance of the "3 Crowns" to the Jewish political tradition, see the first two issues of the new journal founded and edited by Elazar, the *Jewish Political Studies Review*, especially Stuart A. Cohen, "Keter as a Jewish Political Symbol: Origins and Implications," *Jewish Political Studies Review*, volume 1, numbers 1 & 2, Spring, 1989: 39-53.

for even the *Mashiah* is not to be trusted alone with all the powers. Even if he can rule over Rome, there must still be the great Sanhedrin to teach Halakhah to Israel.³²

The Jewish covenantal-political tradition is one in which power is decentralized. No individual, or office, is granted absolute power: indeed, at times, God, as it were, consents to limiting His own prerogatives, and He seems to look favorably on His people's challenges and questioning. For example, Abraham persistently and courageously negotiates for the people of Sodom to persuade God to spare them [Gen. 18:25], unlike Noah who passively accepts the deluge; Moses convinces God to spare His people despite their disobedience at Horeb where, as God was writing the tablets containing the laws, the people were building the Golden Calf. Moses refuses God's offer to lead a new and more righteous people; instead, he successfully pleads with God to forgive once again the stubborn and disobedient Israelites — "the Lord listened to me" [Deut. 9:19]. Perhaps the most poignant expression of God's self-limiting power is elaborated in the often cited talmudic text, B. *Baba Mezia* 59b, where God accepts the constitutional legitimacy of a majority of sages quoting God's Torah back to Him, in opposition to His intervention in support of the singular interpretation of one Rabbi. It is later reported that the Prophet Elijah said that God "smiled and said, 'My children have overcome me!'"³³

The Biblical covenants, although structurally similar to earlier Near Eastern compacts, are dramatically transformed:

Mesopotamian and West Semitic Covenants were designed to limit previously independent entities by making them vassals, regulating their external behavior but leaving their internal life alone. Israelite covenants, on the other hand, function as liberating devices that call into existence new entities. God, by entering into a covenant with humans, accepts a limitation on the exercise of His omnipotence, thus endowing mankind with freedom, but the price of that freedom is the acceptance of an internal reform, as well as external obligations.³⁴

Undoubtedly, a covenantal tradition can be seen chronologically prior to the Biblical text among the Amorites and Hittites. These earlier covenantal structures share the basic common characteristics contained in the Biblical frameworks, including a prologue, preamble, enumer-

32. Elazar, "Covenant, as the Basis of the Jewish Political Tradition," p. 22. Elazar sees four paradigmatic covenants: 1) Noah with all of mankind; 2) Abraham, pre-political; 3) Sinai, creation of the people; and 4) the covenant on the Plains of Moab (Deuteronomy) where a constitution is established. His classificatory scheme is informative: Elazar's method of inquiry and analysis enables one to determine whether the covenant was personal or collective, with whom it was enacted, who introduced it, whether it was concluded privately or publicly, and who the obligated parties were to be. Elazar, "The Covenant Idea in Politics," part III, p. 18 and pp. 27-31.

33. Cited in Robert Gordis, *The Dynamics of Judaism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 79.

34. Daniel J. Elazar, "Covenant, as the Basis for the Jewish Political Tradition," pp. 6-7.

ation of the underlying principles, and an oath to abide by them, with appropriate sanctions imposed for disobedience. Nevertheless, the Judaic covenantal tradition differs, in that "a covenant was used to found a people, making their moral commitment to one another [i.e., between the people and God] far stronger and more enduring than that of a vassal to an imperial overlord." God, by definition omnipotent and omniscient, partakes of the covenant as a partner, not as overlord. And this relationship was not exclusively theocratic — it was also political.

The demise of the political aspect of Jewish covenantal thought can be attributed to its being ignored by Christian theologians, and to its treatment by Jewish legalists who continually narrowed its broader scope and political implications.³⁵ This occurred in spite of the fact that "there is hardly a single covenant in the Bible that does not have strong political overtones or undertones:" for example, the covenant between Jonathan and David is more than a private mutual pledge of friendship, and the pre-Sinaitic covenant of God and Abraham, likewise, has a political dimension in that God grants to Abraham and his lineage a territorial and "national" legacy. It is, however, the Sinaitic covenant which establishes a constitutional relationship between God and His people. This covenant is fundamental to understanding the Jewish political-constitutional tradition. All the people *consent* to abide by God's law. Moses, acting within constitutional boundaries, is to be the intermediary between God and man.³⁶ The political-covenantal structure provides for the establishment of meaningful freedom, and the principle of individual and community consent. When God offers to lead the people out of slavery (Exodus 6:2-9), the people unexpectedly refuse. Elazar observes that

this is the only case in the Bible of a clearly unilateral effort on the part of God to impose a covenant. And, in fact, even here there is some equivocation because, according to the Biblical text, all God is trying to do is to renew a covenant that was established long since. Nevertheless, it does not work. God never again tries to impose a covenant without involving the partners who must consent to it.³⁷

With the Theopany at Sinai the tone changes remarkably. Here the consent of the people is required and is granted (Exodus 19:7,8).

The authoritative exercise of power by God, or man, is tied to a moral covenantal order which imposes limits on Divine and human action. The Jewish polity emerges in a series of communities, integrated, coordinated, but not fused, so that each retains its distinctiveness. The

35. Elazar, *Covenant and Freedom*, pp. 5-6.

36. "It can be said that, in Jewish tradition, the ties of covenant are the concretization of the relationship of dialogue which, when addressed to God, makes humans holy and when addressed to one's peers, makes people human." Elazar, "The Covenant Idea in Politics," part IV, p. 1.

37. *Ibid.*, part III, p. 3.

individual is part of a community through which he is fulfilled and, in Aristotelian terminology, he is directed to a higher telos — toward God and His vision for man. Man is not powerless, or without free will and reason. His consent is required to God's magnanimous covenantal offer. God, in turn, obligates himself to fulfill His promises. The Biblical text continually depicts a God who is generous and patient with His people, but there are limits. Man's free will allows him to choose and, in his imperfection, he often errs. Nevertheless, the covenantal idea stands as the norm for a potentially harmonious existence, balancing freedom and obligation. For Elazar, the covenant is not an ideological vision, but "the outlines of a pattern" suggesting "unity without uniformity."³⁸ However, freedom of choice is never to be confused with tolerating evil, worshipping of man, and the idolization of that which is ephemeral and tenuous. Although God, the sovereign of creation, cannot be truly the equal of man, He "graciously limits himself so that humans may become His free partners . . . which creates community and thereby involves a more extensive set of mutual obligations."³⁹

The Judaic political tradition, its vision and institutional arrangements, preceded, by a few hundred years, that of the Greeks. The less systematic Judaic political heritage is best understood, through close textual reading, as an historical narrative through which God and man act, and interact. Elazar proposes an historical-constitutional periodization as a method for the study of the ancient Jewish political tradition. This framework allows him to distinguish four main intellectual and institutional periods, beginning with the Exodus and culminating in the canonization of the Bible. The constitutional father, Moses, lays the basis for the eventual establishment of a loose tribal federation which, in time, will evolve into the Israelite nation. In Elazar's method of periodizing early Jewish history, constitutional watersheds and institutional arrangements are noted and are related to the dynamics of political change.

Government and its institutional frameworks were established in ancient Israel to assist in attaining the good life. This objective was pursued experientially. The Biblical narrative traced the development of a tribal structure as it evolved toward nationhood, and its adaptation to a variety of constitutional traditions and regimes. Elazar sees this development in ancient Jewish history as "a blend of kinship and consent." By 722 B.C.E, Jewish political sovereignty was confined to the Southern Kingdom; the northern tribal structure and prophetic influence was in decline.⁴⁰ With the Josianic reforms and the Book of Deuteronomy, we witness the first attempt to create a written Judaic con-

38. Elazar, "Toward a Meaningful World Covenant," pp. 19, 20.

39. Elazar, *Covenant and Freedom*, pp. 10-12.

40. Elazar, *Government in Biblical Israel*, pp. 105-111.

stitution, and, with the Second Commonwealth, federal institutional arrangements give way to republican rule.

Through careful exegesis of Biblical sources as understood in their historical context, Elazar traces the development of the ancient Judaic bureaucratic infrastructure as it evolved within the locality, tribe and nation.⁴¹ What poignantly emerges in his analysis is the importance of change and transformation in governmental-institutional arrangements, from the family to the household, the clan, tribe, and nation. Within the tribal structure, the *edah* was the fundamental representative body. It was composed of all citizens, and functioned at the local as well as the "national" level of government.⁴² Within the framework of his periodization model, Elazar describes the emerging economic, property, and military arrangements, and their political implications.

The Biblical political tradition allows for a range of regimes, so long as the covenantal principles are not violated. Jewish political thought and practice have assumed a variety of institutional formulations, from nomadic "tribal structures" to federated monarchy, to republican government.⁴³ And

covenants, after all, are designed to create relationships which are then given form rather than creating forms which are then given content. The emphasis on relationships has been a distinguishing characteristic of the Jewish political tradition from the first, and helps explain why a variety of regimes have proved acceptable to the interpreters of Jewish tradition and also why some forms of regime are simply unacceptable, no matter what.⁴⁴

The covenantal framework is dominant in the Jewish political tradition, irrespective of its differing constitutional manifestations. The relationship between the governing and the governed takes precedence over the particular regime at hand.⁴⁵

In his study, the *Book of Joshua*, Elazar applies his theoretical framework and method to an entire book of the Bible. In this truly pioneering work, we are able to see that "the Book of Joshua is a classic of political thought, that can and should be read as a coherent whole, in fact, as a major statement of the classical political world-view of the Bible."⁴⁶ Although not a speculative work, the historical awareness so pervasive in this text makes it, without any doubt, the "most political of books."⁴⁷

41. Ibid., p. 113.

42. Elazar, "The Covenant Idea in Politics," part II, p. 15.

43. Ibid., part III, p. 11.

44. Ibid., part V, p. 13.

45. Daniel J. Elazar, "The Book of Joshua as a Political Classic" (Washington: American Political Science Association, August 28-31, 1986), paper presented at the panel on "Jewish Political Thought," p. 15. Paper now published in *Jewish Political Studies Review*, volume 1, numbers 1 & 2/Spring, 1989: 93-147.

46. Ibid., p. 1.

47. Ibid., p. 59.

Elazar's work in the Biblical political tradition encompasses a wide range of concerns. In its formulation, it is theoretical and conceptual; its language and application, however, are often empirical, legal-institutional, and constitutional. Elazar's familiarity with relevant source material enables him equally to elucidate, and to clarify, the fundamental importance of the covenantal system in Judaic political thought, or to detail the particular political arrangements relevant to a particular epoch or regime. His work reminds us that the retrieval of the Biblical political tradition is inextricably tied to the need for us to be aware of the historical consciousness of the ancient Hebrews, and of their attitudes toward time and progress. Elazar has demonstrated that, from the perspective of the political scientist, it is necessary and fruitful to evaluate the significance of the Biblical text, as it has been redacted, whether Moses was the author of Torah, or not; whether David wrote all of the Psalms, or only some of them; or whether the Deuteronomic text, or texts, precede(s) or follow(s) the literary prophets.

Although the speculative philosophy of the Greeks cannot be found in the Bible, it is a text rich in "politics and vision," the foundation text for Western thought, accessible and applicable to all, not only to the intellectually superior. Elazar's pioneering empirical and theoretical work has encouraged social scientists to venture into the study of the Biblical political tradition. He has demonstrated that imagination is no impediment to scholarship. Although there are recurring references to covenant in the history of political thought, Elazar has reexamined this theo-political concept and retrieved an authentic Jewish political tradition, distinguishable but not separate from its theology. He concludes that "... the covenantal framework is one that secures both the position of the Torah in the Jewish polity and the liberties (in the classic sense) of the Jewish people."⁴⁸

48. Elazar, "The Covenant Idea in Politics," part V, p. 13.

Is Yom HaShoah an Iyyar Event?

JOEL B. WOLOWELSKY

SOME YEARS AGO, IN DISCUSSING THE SIGNIFICANCE of the new days of commemoration relating to the State of Israel that fall in the Jewish month of Iyyar, I suggested that the import of *Yom HaShoah* (Holocaust [Commemoration] Day, 27 Nissan) lies not in its being the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising but in its relationship to *Yom HaAzma'ut* (Israel Independence Day, 5 Iyyar), which is observed a week later.¹ Technically, *Yom HaShoah* misses being an Iyyar phenomenon by a few days. Yet — along with *Yom HaZikaron* (Israeli Memorial Day, 4 Iyyar), and *Yom Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem [Liberation] Day, 28 Iyyar) — it seems to be an “Iyyar event,” that is, a day whose meaning is drawn more from the centrality of the establishment of the State of Israel than from the more narrow, specific focus of *Yom HaShoah* on the destruction of European Jewry.

For the “yeshivah world” on the religious right, *Yom HaShoah* is indeed, very much an Iyyar event, and, therefore, to be rejected along with the other commemoration days established by the Zionist establishment. I have argued elsewhere² that it is the Zionist sponsorship of *Yom HaShoah* (rather than any halakhic constraints or disagreement on the unique significance of the Holocaust) which is the basis of opposition to its observance in the non-Zionist yeshivah world.

Yom HaShoah was created by the Israeli Knesset, but rather than drawing on *Yom HaAzma'ut*, it was designed to impact on it. That is, it seems that its organizers were out to provide the central orientation from which one should shape his or her view of the State. Both in the choice of date (the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto revolt) and official name (originally *Yom HaShoah uMered HaGeta'ot* [Holocaust and Heroism Commemoration Day] and now *Yom HaShoah veHaGevurah* [Holocaust and Heroism Commemoration Day]), the aim was to go beyond simply memorializing the victims of the *Shoah*, and to show that in the midst of the destruction a new image of the Jew emerged — a heroic fighter and not just a victim. The Israeli infantryman was to be, in a sense, the extension of the Jewish partisan; *Yom HaAzma'ut* emerged, so to speak, as a consequence of — and modeled after — the physical heroism celebrated on *Yom HaShoah veHaGevurah*. Yet, in

1. “On Iyyar’s Holidays,” *JUDAISM*, 21:3 (Summer 1972): 299.

2. “Observing Yom HaSho’a,” *Tradition*, 24:4 (Spring 1989): 46-58.

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recent years, the *spiritual* heroism of Jews responding to the unspeakable conditions of the Holocaust has been more appreciated, and the dimension of *shelilat hagolah*, negating the value of the Jewish experience in the exile, because of its passivity and catastrophe, has all but been eliminated from contemporary *Yom HaShoah* observances. For most people, I would argue, *Yom HaShoah* (like *Yom HaZikaron*) now primarily provides, in both its suffering and heroic aspects, the backdrop against which one can appreciate the full significance of *Yom HaAzma'ut*, which remains the central event and object of national focus.

Yom HaShoah is but one of the two days of commemoration of the Holocaust; the other is the Ninth of Av, the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple, which serves as the *national* day of mourning for all Jewish catastrophes. The Tenth of Tevet, established by the Israeli Rabbinate as *Yom haKaddish haKellali* [General Kaddish Day], was not set up as a day of national mourning but, rather, as one of *private yahrzeit* for those who did not know the exact date of death of their murdered relatives. *Yom HaShoah* and the Ninth of Av are not mutually exclusive. While *Yom HaShoah* is Israel-oriented, *Tishah b'Av* (the Ninth of Av) embraces and connects the agony of the Shoah with the agonies of centuries of Jewish suffering. Thus, over the last decade, virtually all major rabbinic authorities — from right to left — have joined in calling for an elegy for the Holocaust to be added to the traditional *kinnot* (the lamentations recited on the evening commencing *Tishah b'Av* and the following morning). The sacred literature of the day has been expanded to include the *major catastrophe of twentieth-century Jewry*.

It is, therefore, significant when a sensitive contemporary Orthodox thinker like Irving (Yitz) Greenberg celebrates the fact that, for many, the focus of commemoration of the Holocaust is *exclusively Yom HaShoah* and unconnected with the Ninth of Av. "The Holocaust should not be subsumed under the rubric of the tragedies that preceded it," he writes. "It was too momentous for that; it needed its own day and liturgy."³ There are, of course, historical arguments that can be made for that view, although ultimately there is no way of determining that the Holocaust is more "momentous" than the destruction of the Temples or even, say, the expulsion from Spain. But, I believe, the contention that the Holocaust should be separated from the Ninth of Av and commemorated exclusively on *Yom HaShoah* is tied to Greenberg's underlying position regarding *Yom HaAzma'ut*. That is, while both the Holocaust and the establishment of the State are orienting events that shape our view of the world, it is the Holocaust which, for Greenberg, has primary importance.

We all realize that Jews of the second half of the twentieth century have a present and a past different from those of generations of historic

3. Irving Greenberg, *The Jewish Way* (NY: Summit Books, 1988), p. 336.

Jewry. The State of Israel is a major focal point for the majority of world Jewry, and the memory of the Holocaust cannot help but color our view of the world. *Galut* [exile], defined as the *forced exclusion* of the Jewish people from their land, and their relegation to the status of object rather than subject on the playing fields of world history, seems to have come to an end.

Most people, I suggest, would mark the end of this *galut* with the establishment of the State of Israel — which, for so many religious Zionists, marks “the beginning of the growth of our redemption.” But for Greenberg, it was “the Holocaust [which] brought to an end the period of *Galut* Judaism.”⁴

The Jewish ethic of powerlessness had given dignity and ethical direction for almost two thousand years in Diaspora . . . *The Holocaust made it clear that the old accommodation was now impossible* . . . There had to be Jewish power now; the only way to accomplish that was by creating a nation for Jews.⁵

Creation of the State was the Jewish response to the new ethical imperative to exercise power that emerged from the Holocaust. Greenberg tells us that “Yom HaAzmaut is the fundamental response to Yom HaShoah,”⁶ which is to say that, despite the fact that both are orienting experiences for twentieth century Jews, the latter and not the former is the primary contemporary national core experience. As the Yizkor for *Yom HaShoah*, published by Yad Vashem, notes, “Through their [the victims’] merit, the remnants of Israel returned to their inheritance.”

It is this approach which makes *Yom HaShoah* the *exclusive* appropriate day for commemorating the Holocaust. The rebirth of Israel was a seminal event in Jewish history. But, in this view, it did not emerge from a vacuum. It grew out of — or was a response to — the destruction of European Jewry. For Greenberg, “the creation of the State of Israel takes place in the context of a new era in Jewish history.”⁷ It did not initiate this new era. To relegate Holocaust memorialization to *Tishah b’Av* would be to see it only as part of a continuum of tragedies and not as *the* orientating event which sparked the Jewish people to create *Medinat Yisrael*, the modern State of Israel.

Yet, despite the explicit intertwining of *Yom HaShoah* and *Yom HaAzma’ut*, this view is subtly — but significantly — different from the position that *Yom HaShoah* is an Iyyar event. This latter position sees the establishment of the State as the primary image in contemporary Jewish history; the Holocaust is the canvas on which it was drawn. This is in no way to deny the practical role that the Holocaust played in de-

4. Ibid., p. 385.

5. Ibid., emphasis added.

6. Ibid., p. 339.

7. Ibid., p. 380f.

veloping the State. It drew people — refugees — to the land and forced the world to accept the need for the State, whose establishment also helped dissipate the despair that enveloped the Jewish people after the war, and it helped Jews appreciate the miracle of the State. *But it was not the foundation upon which the State, the primary event, rested.*

Greenberg's orientation leads him to what I believe is a misreading of Rabbi Soloveitchik's portrayal of the creation of the State. Apparently building on the Rav's assertion that evil demands a practical response more than it requires philosophical explanation, Greenberg notes that "Israel's faith in the God of history demands that an unprecedented event of destruction be matched by an unprecedented act of redemption. World Jewry bent its energies to see to it that this now happened."⁸ He then offers a restatement of his thesis in the words of Rabbi Soloveitchik:

In the heart of a night of terror, full of the horrors of Maidanek, Treblinka, and Buchenwald, in the night of gas chambers and crematoria, a night of Absolute Hiddenness [of God], in the night of the reign of the Satan of Doubts and Apostasy ... a night of ceaseless search ... when the people of Israel lay inundated with sorrow, and faint tossing and turning in bed amidst death agonies and the torments of hell [came a knock on the door of Jewish history].⁹

The ellipses and brackets are Greenberg's. The first ellipsis, perhaps used for ecumenical reasons, mentions the pressures to "sweep the beloved Israel into the Christian Church." The second, more significantly, speaks of God's revelation:

In this night of ceaseless search for the Beloved, in this very night [God] arose. The God who concealed Himself in His splendid secrecy suddenly appeared and knocked on the tent of the beloved, who was lying inundated with sorrow ... With this knocking at the entrance to the beloved, while she was yet wrapped in mourning, the State of Israel was born.

The "knocks" are the reversals in the political, military, theological, cultural, and other areas of Jewish and, indeed, world history that made manifest God's intervention.

World Jewry might have bent its energies to see to it that the State was established, but Rabbi Soloveitchik is not ready to credit them or any other human:

I do not know whom the newspaper reporters saw sitting at the president's table at the fateful meeting at which it was decided to establish the State of Israel. But anyone who viewed through spiritual eyes could sense the true chairman who conducted matters ... If some anonymous person had opened that United Nations meeting, the State of Israel would not have been born. But if the Beloved bangs on the presidential table, the miracle happens.¹⁰

8. Ibid., p. 378.

9. Quoted by Greenberg from "*Kol Dodi Dofek*," in *Torah U'Melukhah*, Simon Federbush, ed. (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1961), p. 21.

10. R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "*Kol Dodi Dofek*," in P. Peli, ed., *Besod haYahid vekaYahad* (Jerusalem: Orot, 1976), p. 355.

Greenberg, of course, recognizes God's hand in all of history, including the establishment of the State. But he is far from the Rav's position when he insists that "in the case of the State of Israel, however, the human role in redemption is dominant and self-assertive."¹¹ And when Rabbi Soloveitchik then laments the failure of many to hear the call, it is the knocking of God demanding a return to Israel that he considers, not the call of the Holocaust to establish a state. *Medinat Yisroel* (The State of Israel) burst forth "in this night of terror," not out of it.

Of course, for the Rav, the Holocaust itself does demand a response — but that is because for him *all* evil calls for a reaction, not because the *Shoah* stands out as more significant than other national Jewish catastrophes. Greenberg concedes that Rabbi Soloveitchik argued for moving commemoration of the Holocaust from 27 Nissan to *Tishah b'Av*, but postulates that it was only a "fall-back" position. He argued that the Rav was anxious that *Yom HaShoah* "might not amount to anything, especially since it was being resisted by the Orthodox," and that he was "convinced that the day [27 Nissan] would disappear in another generation (when the living survivors were gone) and fearful that the memory of the Holocaust would sink into historical oblivion with the day ..."¹² But it is much more consistent with Rabbi Soloveitchik's thinking and writings to say that he felt that the Holocaust should be commemorated on *Tishah b'Av* as a matter of principle, and that there was nothing essential about tying that commemoration to *Yom HaAzma'ut*.¹³

If, as an Iyyar event, the purpose of *Yom HaShoah* is to help us appreciate the contemporary significance of *Yom HaAzma'ut*, there is no need to oppose also spotlighting the destruction of the period in the context of other devastations that are memorialized on *Tishah b'Av*. These are not mutually exclusive. But if the Holocaust has special standing as the beginning of a new period in Jewish history and the catalyst for the establishment of the State, then it needs its own exclusive observance in a way that highlights its foundation status for *Yom HaAzma'ut*. This seems to be Greenberg's position.

Other issues are colored by this delicate distinction between the Holocaust as the dark backdrop against which the miracle of the State shines brightly — and which makes *Yom HaShoah* an Iyyar event — and the Holocaust as the tragic event which oriented world Jewry to establish the State. Liturgy is one example.

11. Ibid., p. 380.

12. Ibid., p. 336.

13. However, it is important to note that, as a practical matter, Rabbi Soloveitchik never opposed the wide-spread observance of *Yom HaShoah* which had a firm hold at Yeshiva University and throughout the Modern Orthodox community. I believe this was because *Yom HaShoah* observance, in and of itself, carries no specific philosophic underpinnings and can be seen as an important educational event which has wide-spread acceptance among World Jewry.

One need not be an anti-Zionist to be potentially uncomfortable, theologically and historically, with the prayer that memorializes Holocaust victims with the claim that “through their merit, the remnants of Israel returned to their inheritance.” It is a bold statement on the inter-relationship between the Holocaust and the establishment of the State that not everyone is prepared to make.

New liturgy for *Yom HaAzma'ut* is another example. Consider the *Al hanissim* prayer for Israel Independence Day authorized by the religious kibbuz movement.

You aroused the hearts of our fathers to return to our land which You had granted them, to settle and rebuild it. And when the evil empire ruled over us and closed the gates of our land to those fleeing a cruel enemy ... You freed the land.¹⁴

Here, the State — which is primary — is well on its way *before* the Holocaust, which is but the immediate background for the major event. (And the “evil empire” of the period is England.) Compare this with the *Al hanissim* prayer of American Conservative Jewry.

In the days of destruction of the world war ... six million of our brothers, young and old, were killed ... The gates of their homeland were closed [to the survivors] and the seven nations covenanted to destroy Your nation Israel. But you mercifully stood by them in their hour of need ...¹⁵

Here, the beginning of the story of *Yom HaAzma'ut* begins “in the days of destruction of the world war.” I have suggested elsewhere¹⁶ that the difference in orientation might reflect an Israeli-American split, but perhaps it would be better to suggest that it relates to whether or not *Yom HaShoah* is perceived as an Iyyar event. If it is, it is the backdrop and not the foundation for the State of Israel.

As a practical matter, memorialization of the Holocaust has already been incorporated into the *Tishah b'Av kinnot*, removing the possibility that the *Shoah* have its own *exclusive* day and liturgy. Greenberg does not take cognizance of this, but his over-all stimulating presentation, along with his otherwise eloquent exposition on the traditional Jewish holidays, gives food for thought. In the end, though, only time — and not logical debates — will give us the historical perspective to decide whether the establishment of the State will be the central, orienting event for twenty-first century Jews, or if, as Greenberg proposes, the Holocaust will be given primary (or perhaps equal) standing as the fundamental, focal event initiating a new period in Jewish history. In the meanwhile, we are left with the healthy tension of the question and the creativity that is ignited by its discussion.

14. Kibbuz Hadati, *Seder Tefilot LeYom HaAzmaut* (Tel Aviv: 1969), p. 101.

15. Jules Harlow, ed., *Likutei Tefilah* (New York: 1965), p. 204.

16. “From Shoa to Yeshua,” *Morasha: A Journal of Religious Zionism*, 3:1 (Summer 1987): 18-21.

The Hebraic Foundation of Christian Faith According to Reinhold Niebuhr

EYAL NAVEH

WHEN RICHARD FOX REACHED THE FINAL stages of his biography on Reinhold Niebuhr's, the famous American theologian and political thinker, he concluded that Niebuhr's uniqueness lay in "the energy and zeal with which he pursued paradox and irony in both life and thought."¹ Defining Niebuhr as a German-American Anglophile, a religious-secular preacher, a liberal crusader against liberalism, or a Jamesian relativist who embraced God and revelation, Fox could easily add another paradox: a Christian theologian who welcomed and applauded Judaism. Superficially, however, it seems that Niebuhr's attitude toward the Jewish question lacked the ambiguities and ironies which characterized his opinions on other issues. He deeply respected Judaism as a religion, he expressed a clear personal affinity with the Jews as a people, and he utterly supported Zionism as a political movement.² Contemporaries and scholars both agreed that Niebuhr's sympathy with, and knowledge of, Judaism was so overwhelming that it made him quite atypical among Protestant theologians, whose approach to the subject was much more cautious and ambiguous.³

Precisely this consent among scholars precluded a profound discussion on Niebuhr's attitude toward Judaism, primarily at the level of his thoughts and opinions. Niebuhr wrote on various aspects of this subject matter, but, to the best of my knowledge, no systematic work has analyzed his approach to Judaism, and interpreted it within the broader context of his thinking. Despite renewed interest in his life and thought among various scholars of different disciplines, Niebuhr's "Jewish connection" receives only partial attention in current writings.

1. Richard Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (San Francisco, Harper & Row Publishers, 1987, first published in 1985), p. 291.

2. No surprise, then, that in the late sixties the president of the Hebrew University personally flew to Niebuhr's hometown and granted him an honorary degree for his lifetime support of the Jews. Similarly, after Niebuhr's death, when *Christianity and Crisis*, the journal that Niebuhr had founded, published a critical essay against Israel, Niebuhr's widow, Ursula, demanded the removal of his name from the cover page of the periodical. See Roy Eckardt, "A Tribute to Reinhold Niebuhr," *Midstream*, 17 (June/July, 1971): 16; *New York Times*, May 8, 1972, p. 9.

3. Egal Feldman, "American Protestant Theologians on the Frontiers of Jewish-Christian Relation, 1922-82", in David A. Gerber (ed.), *Anti-Semitism in American History* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), pp. 364-365.

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This article attempts to concentrate upon this somewhat neglected aspect of his thought, in order to provide a conceptual framework for further discussion and comment by Christians and Jews familiar with Niebuhr's thinking and opinions.⁴

My central argument is that the ambiguities, paradoxes, and ironies, which Niebuhr articulated and pursued as the main devices of giving meaning to the drama of human history, also characterized his writings on the Jewish question. Contrary to the common impression, an analysis of Niebuhr's main works dealing with Judaism reveals the same dualistic, or, rather, dialectical approach which made him one of the most original thinkers of the twentieth century. To paraphrase his famous statement on democracy,⁵ Niebuhr asserted that man's capacity for faith in Judaism made Christianity possible, and, thus, man's continuing adherence to Christianity should render Judaism necessary. While most Protestant theologians agreed with the beginning of this statement, they objected, as a matter of principle, to its end.

In an interview with the historian, Harlan B. Phillips, for an oral history project at Columbia university, Niebuhr revealed the epistemological basis of his thinking. "There must be an absence of either/or thinking. On the whole it's both/and." He admitted that "you can't altogether solve your problems just by the both/and principle, yet pragmatically you need to work toward a solution in the middle without reaching the middle dead end."⁶ The way in which Niebuhr dealt with Judaism demonstrated this epistemological concern. As a Christian theologian, he advocated an emphatic stand toward the Jewish faith, as both compatible with, and distinct from, Christianity. He stressed both the universal message and the particular significance of Judaism as a religion, emphasized both the general mission and the unique obligations of the Jewish people as a community of believers, and endorsed both Zionist and non-Zionist solutions as modern responses to the Jewish plight in history. While advocating such a point of view, Niebuhr, nonetheless, tried to avoid the "middle dead end" by a dynamic analysis, which takes into account the particular historical circumstances of the Jews in the twentieth century.

In his early writing, Niebuhr mentioned that the Jewish religion

4. I gathered the material for this article from the various writings of Niebuhr on this subject which appeared in his monographs, his many articles in periodicals and journals, and his personal letters, interviews and speeches that I found in Niebuhr's papers at the Library of Congress. For information on his published works I benefitted greatly from D. B. Robinson, *Reinhold Niebuhr's Works: A Bibliography* (University Press of America, 1983, first published in 1979).

5. "Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary." Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), p. xiii.

6. Interview with Harlan B. Phillips, Feb. 28, 1953, *The Reminiscences of Reinhold Niebuhr* (Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, 1957), p. 79.

seemed to him close the the Social Gospel movement of American Protestantism, because it conveys a message of a possible redemption within history. The vision of immanent redemption in Judaism, combined with the social, rather than the individual nature of the millennium, influenced early Christians, according to Niebuhr. As a socialist and liberal minister in the twenties and thirties, he favored this tradition more than the Hellenistic legacy that stressed transcendental and individualistic redemption, beyond and above the actualities of human history. As a pastor in a Detroit working-class congregation, he was impressed by Jewish sensitivities to social problems, and as a social activist he appreciated what he perceived to be a Jewish tendency to prefer the concrete ideal of a saved society over the abstract ideal of spiritual redemption.⁷

In his early writings, he characterized the Jews as a Messianic people that possessed a utopian dream, but he stressed, nonetheless, the difference between Christianity and Judaism. While Christian orthodoxy sought individual emancipation from history's injustices, Jewish orthodoxy strove for the achievement of justice in history.⁸ Niebuhr thoroughly rejected the otherworldly message of Christian orthodoxy which found transcendental remedies to human problems beyond life and beyond history.⁹ But the liberal, Social Gospel concept of immanent redemption within history also did not satisfy him.¹⁰ In 1932, he officially declared his liberation from this tradition, and, in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, stated that the Kingdom of God would never be fully realized on earth.¹¹ Hence, his early interpretation of the influence of Judaism upon Christian theology had ambiguous results. As a social, "living" religion, it helped Christians to fight their Hellenistic penchant

7. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic* (New York: Willet Clark & Company, 1929), pp. 187-188.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

9. His debate on this matter with his brother, Helmut Richard, and later, with Karl Barth and his Crisis theology, is well known. See for example, Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1935), pp. 128-129; Helmut Richard Niebuhr, "The Grace of Doing Nothing," *Christian Century*, vol. 49, no. 12 (March 23, 1932): 378-380; and no. 14 (April 6, 1932): 447; Reinhold Niebuhr, "Christian Otherworldliness," *Christianity and Society*, vol. 9, no. 1 (Winter 1948): 12; Richard Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography*, pp. 142-159.

10. Major differences between Niebuhr and the Social Gospel movement could already be traced in his early essays in the twenties. He questioned their beliefs in evolutionary progress and human innocence, and doubted whether man indeed could overcome his sin of pride. See "Impotent Liberalism," *Christian Century*, vol. 43, no. 6 (Feb. 11, 1926): 167-8; "Our Secular Civilization," *The Christian Century*, April 12, 1926, in *The Christian Century Reader* (New York: Association Press, 1960), pp. 23-28; "Christ's View of the Kingdom," *The Christian Century*, vol. 43, no. 26 (July 29, 1926): 843; *Does Civilization Needs Religion?* (New York: The McMillan Co., 1927), pp. 234-235; Letter to John Bennett, April 24, 1931, *Reinhold Niebuhr Papers*, box no. 43.

11. *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), pp. 19-21.

which might lead to otherworldly quietism and an escape from responsibility. On the other hand, such a religion could create false Messianic and utopian visions of immanent redemption, which, according to Niebuhr, would necessarily lead to disillusion and despair.

Later, when he had moved to New York and had become more familiar with Judaism, Niebuhr realized that the Jewish attitude toward immanent redemption was, to say the least, ambivalent. Any form of literal Messianism contradicted orthodox Jewish thought and was perceived as blasphemous. Thus, when Niebuhr opposed any form of utopia, and emphasized the existence of a dialectical tension between the Divine sphere of eternity and the mundane realm of history, he asserted that, according to Biblical religion, the Kingdom of God always remains a vision, never a reality. Any attempt to translate this vision into reality was considered by him to be idolatry and false Messianism — a pagan remnant, alien to both Judaism and Christianity.¹²

Already in the late thirties, Niebuhr developed the essence of his dialectical theology, which was called later “Christian Realism.” He argued that, according to the Biblical tradition, “the Kingdom of God is an ideal possibility which is not irrelevant to history and yet is always beyond the actualities of history.”¹³ In order to substantiate the latter part of this statement, Niebuhr drew upon the vast literature of Christian theology: from the Augustinian doctrine of the “two cities” to Calvin’s notion of Man’s tragic existence; from Christian eschatological and apocalyptic visions to the neo-orthodox concept of human sin.

Yet, when Niebuhr attempted to substantiate the former part of his statement about the partial relevance of the redemptive vision of the Kingdom to human history, he replied primarily upon the Hebraic tradition as expressed in the Old Testament. The prophetic message supplied him with the necessary material that explained why, despite the impossibility of immanent redemption, human beings, communities, and nations should live according to the normative vision of mankind’s redemption. The prophets demonstrated that, despite mankind’s failure to reach perfection, the perfect and eternal sphere of the Kingdom of God was relevant to human history as a constant source of judgment and as an ultimate criterion for normative behavior. To Niebuhr, prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and, especially, Amos, subjected human history to the judgment of Providence, and, therefore, denounced the deviation of their society from Divine norms and ethics. The prophets believed in the necessary tension between the mundane and Divine spheres, viewed redemption as an ideal possibility at the end of history, and thus denied a complete separation between the City of God and the City of Man. “Without the successful prophet, whose

12. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

13. “The Return of Primitive Religion,” *Christendom*, vol. III, no. 1 (Winter 1938): 6.

moral indictments affect actual changes in the world, we might forget that each moment of human history faces actual and realizable higher possibilities," writes Niebuhr in *Beyond Tragedy*.¹⁴

Admitting that, as a Christian theologian, he sought to strengthen the Hebraic-prophetic content of Christian faith, he devoted much of his intellectual energy to exploring the significance of Biblical prophecy. He discussed this issue with the well-known radical writer, Waldo Frank, a non-observant Jew who became Niebuhr's close friend for life. Frank had followed the well-trodden path of a New York intellectual. He started as a radical socialist affiliated with Randolph Bourn and *The Seven Arts* paper during the first World War, became a Bohemian "Lost Generation" author in the twenties, a neo-Communist activist with a penchant for organic communities in the thirties, and a Roosevelt supporter beginning in the forties. In a companion article, "Toward a Program for Jews," published in Franks's collection, *The Jews in Our Day*, Niebuhr wrote:

Jewish spirituality combines heaven and earth, as it were. It does not separate soul from body or mind from nature but understands man and history in the unity of man's physical and spiritual life. In this it . . . lies at the foundation of the world-affirming side of Christianity and of ethical seriousness in our western culture. I know of no one who understands this genius of Jewish religion better than Mr. Frank. He expresses it beyond the restraint of traditional Jewish legalism (sic) and in a deeper dimension than those secular idealists among the Jews who have dissipated the religious inheritance of Judaism while maintaining the prophetic passion for justice.¹⁵

Waldo Frank asserted that the vision of the prophets of Israel helped the Jew survive. The "eternal side" of the prophetic vision constituted the Jewish homeland for three millennia. This vision characterized the Jewish Promised Land as a universal concept — the Abrahamic Covenant with God, and not as a particular place such as Palestine. Writing in the mid-forties, when the Jews faced the Holocaust, Frank argued that

Israel today . . . the Israel that longs to survive . . . must re-forge in modern terms its relation with the eternal, in order to continue to exist in time. This is why any program, such as Zionism, if it neglects the "eternal side" of Judaism, will find that it has neglected the "practical side" of Israel's survival.¹⁶

14. *Beyond Tragedy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 286. See also "Revelation and the Meaning of History," The Duddleian Lecture for the Academic Year 1941-1942, Harvard University, April 14, 1942, in *Harvard Divinity School Bulletin*, vol. 41 (Jan. 3, 1944): 35; *Do the State and Nation Belong to God or the Devil* (London: Students Christian Movement Press, 1937), p. 17.

15. "Toward a Program for Jews," quoted from *Contemporary Jewish Record*, vol. 7, no. 3 (June 1944): 239.

16. Waldo Frank, "Prophecy as Politics," *Contemporary Jewish Record*, vol. 7, no. 3 (June 1944): 250.

Niebuhr agreed that the universal prophetic vision gave meaning to the Jews as a particular community of believers throughout history, but he doubted whether such a vision could serve forever as a surviving force. Always using the dialectical method, he stated that history has two dimensions, the natural one of necessity and the eternal one of freedom. The profound significance of the prophetic vision derived from this dialectical tension. Inasmuch as the prophet appeared as God's "Suffering Servant," he bore witness to the inevitable conflict between the historical necessities of this world and a complete devotion to the eternal realm of freedom. The eternal and universal vision of the prophets became intelligible and meaningful only when counterposed to, and confronted with, the corruption of the natural domain of necessity in history. Thus, no community could rely solely on the universal realm of eternity as a source of its practical survival in the necessary realm of history, not even the Jewish people. No entire nation can be so dedicated to God. Therefore, claimed Niebuhr, the employment of the prophetic message as a socio-political device would lead, at best, to false idealism and, at worst, to dangerous political Messianism. "In principle, a faith which calls upon men to rise above the necessities and limits of nature and to avow universal values, cannot also be used as the instrument of survival, though it ought to recognize the legitimacy of this survival impulse."¹⁷ Thus, Niebuhr supported Zionism only as a survival device which could give the Jewish people socio-political security.

When he debated Christian otherworldliness, Niebuhr emphasized the prophetic message of potential redemption for the individual. However, when he discussed the issue with his many Jewish friends, he used the same message in the opposite direction, warning against the sentimental illusion which would turn the prophetic vision into social and political ideology and, thus, serve as a source of imminent and immanent redemption of a particular ethnic group. In typical Niebuhrian style he wrote that, "in the final analysis a nation cannot be a church, though it must be gratefully recorded that the Jews have come closer to accomplishing this *impossible task* [my italics] than any other people."¹⁸ He summarized this "paradoxical" opinion in *The Children of Light and The Children of Darkness* (1944), when he wrote that the Jews "are actually an ethnic group with a universalistic religious faith which transcends the values of a single people but which they are forced to use as an instrument of survival in an alien world."¹⁹

During the fifties and the sixties, he further developed this idea. He interpreted Franz Rosenzweig's thought as a manifestation of the important links between the Hebraic-Biblical faith and Christianity. According to Niebuhr, Rosenzweig fully comprehended the dialectical ten-

17. Reinhold Niebuhr, "Survival and Religion," p. 245.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

19. *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, p. 143.

sion in the contact between God and Man, viewing it as an encounter "in which the individual is involved as a self, not as a mind, and which answers his anxieties as a spirit who transcends the river of time even while he is carried by that river toward death."²⁰ Such an existential and dialectical relationship separated the religions of history and revelation, like Judaism and Christianity, from any rationalistic or mystical faiths "which look for either an eternal structure or an eternal undifferentiated potency under the flux of time."²¹

Niebuhr further stressed the universal significance of Judaism and its linkage to Christianity in *The Structure of Nations and Empires* (1959), noting that the Jews were called on to be a separate nation, not in order to pursue their own survival, but to realize the will of the transcendent creator, God. "Yaweh was not the exclusive possession of Israel, according to the prophets, who interpreted and enlarged the conception of the covenant, even while they thought only on the basis of the covenant presupposition."²² In "Christians and Jews in Western Civilization," an article first published in the *Journal* of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, he asserted that the two faiths share not only a common monotheism but also a common attitude toward history, toward historic responsibility, and toward the relation to God as a sovereign of history.²³ "Both covenants assume that an historic fact is more than a mere fact; it is but a disclosure of the mystery which bares history . . . Both covenant faiths must bear witness to their revelation."²⁴

Niebuhr admitted that, on the surface, the two faiths differed in their attitude towards Messianism, human Sin, Grace and Law, Universality and Particularity. But, for him, the very recognition of a dialectical tension between the two religions demonstrated that these differences were mainly in emphasis rather than simple contrast. Historically, he argued, Christianity started as a "Jewish civil war." The killing of Jesus should be attributed, therefore, to the religious drama within the Jewish community, and not to the struggle against pagan Rome. Admittedly, normative Judaism rejected the notion of Jesus as the ultimate expression of Divine revelation, but the figure of the "Suffering Servant" who would fulfill the Messianic hope had appeared already in Second Isaiah; hence, the Messianic hope was central to Judaism. The offense of Jesus, for Judaism, "lay primarily in the crucified rather than in the triumphant Messiah; and in the Christian assertion that,

20. Reinhold Niebuhr, "Rosenzweig's Message," *Commentary*, vol. 15, no. 3 (March 1953): 311.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 312.

22. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Structure of Nations and Empires* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 161.

23. Niebuhr incorporated "Christians and Jews in Western Civilization" as a chapter in his book, *Pious and Secular America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).

24. *Pious and Secular America*, pp. 96-97.

in the drama of his crucifixion, we have a revelation of the divine mercy in which God takes the sin of the world upon himself."²⁵ Niebuhr cited Martin Buber, who pointed out that the Jew could not accept the fact that, in an unredeemed world, Jesus affirmed that "redemption has somehow or other taken place."²⁶

But, to Niebuhr, the essence of the Messianic belief seems similar in both religions. Jesus did not redeem world history, but only revealed the relation of history to its Divine source. The Christian love ethic (*agape*), which Jesus expressed on the cross, paradoxically disclosed not only the fulfillment of human history (*telos*) but also the very annihilation and negation of that history (*finis*).²⁷ According to Niebuhr's theology, which had already culminated in his prestigious Gifford address (1939), "the Kingdom of God as it had come in Christ means a disclosure of the meaning of history but not the full realization of this meaning."²⁸ From such a perspective, Jesus' crucifixion entailed a radical rejection of any utopianism, or imminent and immanent redemption within history, or an inauguration of the Kingdom of God on earth. The idea of the Second Coming in the New Testament reinforced this anti-utopian Messianism through the emphasis of Anti-Christ at the end of history, which demonstrated that history would always remain in an unregenerated stage. This Messianic perception corresponded to the Hebraic Messianism, which had guarded against utopianism, and had never expected the Kingdom of God to arrive in history except in a transfigured natural order, such as in the vision of First Isaiah. Hence, concluded Niebuhr, the difference between Christianity and Judaism regarding the Messianic hope "is one of emphasis and there is no radical contrast."²⁹

Niebuhr's diagnosis of the human condition also enabled him to narrow the gap between the pessimistic Christian doctrine of original sin and the basic hope and optimism of normative Judaism. Though he was known as the most prominent theologian who reintroduced the notion of sin to American Protestantism, Niebuhr, nonetheless, articulated a peculiar interpretation of this concept. In *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, he noted that "sin is natural in the sense that it is universal but not in the sense that it is necessary."³⁰ While inherited and inevitable, original sin was not a biological deficiency, since the Fall of man came after the Creation, and was not coterminous with Creation. Hence,

25. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

27. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. II (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), pp. 286, 288.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 288

29. *Pious and Secular America*, p. 101

30. *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), p. 242.

original sin proceeded from a defect of human will, a corruption of human freedom and, therefore, should be perceived as belonging to human responsibility.³¹

Such exegesis resembled the Jewish doctrine of *Yezer Hara* (evil impulse). It viewed evil as an inherent potential or possibility of human personality, which should, and could, be overcome only through repression and as a result of daily confrontation within each human soul. According to Judaism, the greatest conqueror is the one who conquers his passion, who has conquered himself. "Who is mighty? — he that subdues his [evil] nature" (*Aboth* 4,1). Thus, both the Christian doctrine of original sin as Niebuhr perceived it, and the Jewish doctrine of *Yezer Hara*, negated human perfection on one hand, but opposed human fatalism on the other hand. Both provided hope for human beings in an unregenerated world by urging them to overcome their natural deficiencies through the realization of their free will and responsibility. Again, concluded Niebuhr, "there are differences in emphasis in both the diagnoses of the human situation and the religious assurances corresponding to the diagnoses. But there is not simple contrast."³²

Dealing with the issue of law and grace, Niebuhr opposed the common Christian belief that Judaism is the religion of law, roughly equated with the Decalogue of the Old Testament, while Christianity is based on Divine grace, especially characterized through the love ethic of the Sermon on the Mount. Rather, he portrayed a moral process, already embodied in the Decalogue, that reached its summit in the Christian ethic of love. "Let us assume that Christianity raises the moral pinnacle more consistently than Judaism. But let us also admit that there is a tendency in both faiths to climb the moral pinnacle to the ultimate degree."³³ This process, however, seemed hard to demonstrate. Christians denied the validity of Jewish legalism, such as dietary and Sabbath laws, precisely because they accepted the doctrine of grace and forgiveness as the ultimate answer for the human condition. Dialectically, the Doctrine of Grace at the end of the redemptive process — which had started with the Decalogue — rendered obsolete its literal (*mizvot*) commands. On this issue, Niebuhr admitted, "many Christians see the most striking difference between Christianity as a religion of redemption and Judaism as a religion of law."³⁴

Niebuhr did not find any theological answer to such a major difference. Therefore, he resorted to pseudo-historical proofs based upon "empirical" common sense. He first warned his fellow Christians not to claim any moral superiority and capacity for ultimate love, as a consequence of the Doctrine of Grace.³⁵ As human beings, people have

31. *Ibid.*, p. 255

32. *Pious and Secular America*, p. 101.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

the capacity to love only as they have the security of the love of others. Niebuhr then noted that Jews in America were more creative than Christians in establishing brotherhood with the Blacks, in order to show that the Doctrine of Grace influenced in practice those who theologically rejected its validity. "In short," he concluded, "if we measure the two faiths by their moral fruits, the Jewish faith does not fall short, particularly in collective moral achievement, whatever the superior insight of the Christian faith may be."³⁶

Regarding the problem of universality and particularity, Niebuhr, again, inclined toward an equivocal interpretation which, nonetheless, led him to radical conclusions. He admitted that, unlike Christianity, the Jewish religion is not universal in the sense of being missionary. But, relying on the prophetic message, he asserted that Judaism worshipped a God who is the sovereign of all people and, unlike the pagan gods, offered no special security to the ancient Hebrews. Again, he accepted Franz Rozenzweig's dialectical analysis of Judaism as a potentially universal religion based on the historical and mythical experience of a particular nation. He viewed the two faiths as having one center, "worshipping the same God, with Christianity serving the purpose of carrying the prophetic message to the Gentile world."³⁷

Such an analysis had radical consequences, because it opposed any sort of missionary activity among the Jews. By this outlook, Reinhold Niebuhr, a Christian theologian, undermined what is perhaps the central Christian duty, one that transcends particular denominations, specific locations, and certain periods of time. Rejecting the Christian demand for a monopoly on salvation, and arguing that Christians should recognize the authentic autonomy of the Jewish faith, he warned against any attempt to proselytize among the Jews, clearly stating that "it is not our business to convert the Jews to Christianity,"³⁸ because that, in his opinion, obscured "the common spiritual and moral factors of both religions, which are usually a Christian inheritance from the older Jewish faith."³⁹ Niebuhr's position stemmed not only from his emphasis on the abstract theological heritage of both religions, but also from his insight pertaining to the historical and social relationship of the two communities of believers.

Our analysis assumes that these [missionary] activities are wrong not only because they are futile . . . They are wrong because the two faiths despite

35. "It is almost inevitable that we as Christians should claim uniqueness for our faith as a religion of redemption. But we must not claim moral superiority because of that uniqueness." *Ibid.*, p. 106.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

38. Reinhold Niebuhr "The Son of Man Must Suffer," in *Justice and Mercy*, ed. by Ursula M. Niebuhr (New York: 1974), p. 85.

39. Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Unsolved Religious Problem in Christian-Jewish Relations," *Christianity and Crisis*, vol. 26, no. 21 (Dec. 12, 1966): 280.

differences are sufficiently alike for the Jew to find God more easily in terms of his own religious heritage than by subjecting himself to the hazards of guilt feeling involved in a conversion to a faith which, whatever its excellencies, must appear to him as a symbol of an oppressive majority culture Practically nothing can purify the symbol of Christ as the image of God in the imagination of the Jew from the taint with which ages of Christian oppression in the name of Christ tainted it. This is not merely an historic matter. We are reminded daily of the penchant of anti-semitic and semi-fascist groups, claiming the name of Christ for their campaigns of hatred.⁴⁰

No doubt, such an interpretation challenged conventional ideas among Jews and Christians alike. Some Jewish Orthodox Rabbis resisted Niebuhr's universalistic interpretation of their faith, and some Christian evangelical theologians opposed the consequences of such a positive assessment of Judaism. A brief discussion of these two reactions is necessary in order to single out further Niebuhr's unique opinion of the dialectical relationship between Judaism and Christianity. It should elaborate his epistemological interpretation of the paradoxical situation of man in history, which could be partly comprehended only through irony.⁴¹

Rabbi Levi A. Olan of Dallas, Texas, opposed Niebuhr from an orthodox perspective, in a detailed essay which appeared in JUDAISM of Spring 1956. He rejected Niebuhr's interpretation that the Fall of Adam derived from a corrupted human free will, and refuted the relationship of such an interpretation to normative Judaism. According to the Hebraic tradition, the Fall was not a result of a corrupted human nature, but, rather, an outcome of man's defiance of God in his innocent quest for civilization. Man ate from the fruit of the tree of knowledge and only then became free to sin. To claim that the very desire for knowledge represented Adam and Eve's sinful and deficient nature contradicted the Hebraic tradition.⁴² Olan interpreted Niebuhr as if he had viewed human sin as a biologically innate trait, and overlooked Niebuhr's dialectics, which located human sin both in the realm of nature and of human action, and regarded corruption of the will as an outcome of the paradoxical human existence of being both a creator and creature of circumstances. Such a one-sided interpretation permitted Olan to assert that Niebuhr's doctrine of the Fall contradicted the Jewish spirit, which refused to incorporate sin into an ontological self.⁴³

40. *Pious and Secular America*, p. 108.

41. For Niebuhr's use of irony, see his historical monograph, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952). See also Richard Reinitz, *Irony and Consciousness: American Historiography and Reinhold Niebuhr's Vision* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1980).

42. Levi A. Olan, "Reinhold Niebuhr and the Hebraic Spirit: A Critical Inquiry," JUDAISM, vol. 5, no. 2 (Spring 1956): 110.

43. "Man tends to fall away from his best, but his 'self' is never originally and innately corrupted." Ibid., p. 118.

According to Rabbi Olan, Niebuhr also failed to understand the prophetic message, because he overlooked the tension between judgment and mercy. When Niebuhr incorporated Jesus into the prophetic tradition, asserting that mercy, forgiveness, and sacrificial love represented a further step in the prophetic vision of a Divine Judgment, he ignored the essence of Judaism. "The Rabbis of the Talmud understood this tension and provided God with separate thrones of Judgment, one of justice and one of mercy, but, [unlike Christians], they did not resolve it by a vicarious atonement."⁴⁴

By his Messianic interpretation, Olan reiterated Niebuhr's early arguments which he had later dismissed. To Olan, the Hebraic-Messianic ideal was of this world and had a politico-religious nature. Relying on a specific Rabbinical interpretation, he stated that the "world to come" in Judaism had more an element of this-worldliness than a transcendental quality. Limiting the Messianic time to a future in which the Jews would be free from the bondage of empires, Olan reduced Jewish Messianism to a vision of immanent redemption, a creed which Niebuhr fought against politically and theologically almost all of his life.⁴⁵ This kind of Messianism relied either upon a certain kind of mystical cosmology, or upon a rationalistic, secular interpretation which substituted Man for God. To claim that Judaism falls within these categories seems, indeed, far from Niebuhr's understanding of the Messianic Days of the Old Testament.

Not being able to appreciate (or fully comprehend) Niebuhr's dialectical articulation, Olan, in his article, emphasized only one part of Niebuhr's reasoning, and then counterposed it to normative Judaism. For example, he defined Niebuhrian theology as anti-rationalistic by ignoring the tension between Faith and Reason in Niebuhr's writings. Then he asserted that Judaism, as a holistic way of life, could not accept such an anti-rationalistic world view. To demonstrate how Niebuhr's theology was alien to Judaism, Olan stated that "Judaism is overwhelmingly transcendental in its understanding of God, but there is an immanentism which keeps man near to Him at the same time."⁴⁶ In fact, such a statement fully represents the essence of Niebuhr's position in his long dispute with Karl Barth and other advocates of an other-worldly theology.

When Olan discussed the meaning of history in Niebuhr's theology, he again referred to only one part of Niebuhr's dialectics, claiming that Niebuhr opposed the idea of historical progress, and that he expected the Kingdom of God to come beyond human history. Hence, any moral philosophy of history seemed impossible according to such an interpretation. Insofar as the Hebraic spirit is essentially moral and committed

44. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 111-113.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

to the ideal of progress, Niebuhr's perception of the relationship between the Kingdom of God and history contradicted the essence of Judaism. But Niebuhr actually stressed that the Kingdom of God stood neither beyond nor within the realm of human history.⁴⁷ He never rejected the very idea of progress; he simply cautioned against any utopia that, in the name of progress, aimed to erect or even to represent the perfect society within history.

Olan could not come to terms with Niebuhr's dialectics. He, therefore, consciously or unconsciously, distorted his theology, reduced it to a monistic creed, and counterposed it to the Jewish *Halakhah*, perceived by him as another monistic creed. Certain Orthodox Jews found it hard to accept the Hebraic spirit as an essential source for Christianity. It blurred the uniqueness of their faith and defied the very existence of Judaism as a distinct and separate way of life, always particular and never susceptible to absorption by society at large. Niebuhr's heavy reliance upon Judaism challenged such reasoning, and may explain the hostile reaction of Rabbi Olan not to Niebuhr's theology *per se*, but to the assertion that it is based primarily upon the Hebraic sources.⁴⁸

When the eminent Jewish philosopher, Emil L. Fackenheim, replied to Rabbi Olan in the next copy of JUDAISM, he started with a Jewish joke based on a famous midrash: A parishioner once argued before his rabbi that

Judaism is whatever Christianity is not. A belief or book ceases to be part of Judaism the moment it is no longer exclusively Jewish. Hence, the Bible has long ceased to be a Jewish book. And the same must now be said of the Talmud, since it is read, translated and commented upon by Christians. The substance of Judaism, for our time, is Yiddish. For this is still our exclusive possession.⁴⁹

The motive behind Olan's criticism of Niebuhr's Hebraic spirit illustrated the relevance of this joke. It sprang neither from lack of knowledge nor from lack of good will, but from a certain state of mind designed to think of Judaism as what Christianity is not.

Professor Fackenheim opposed this interpretation, and tried to show how Niebuhr's theology resembled the Jewish tradition, a tradition which contains more than the exclusiveness of Jewish Orthodoxy. For him, Niebuhr's approach was shared more or less by religious existentialists like Kierkegaard, Buber and Rosenzweig, and differed from the rationalism of Aristotle, Kant and Spinoza. To Fackenheim, Niebuhr and the Hebraic spirit "share the proposition that man is in need of

47. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. II, p. 286.

48. "The New Testament does contain stands which derive from the prophetic view of God," Olan concluded, "but these are not the ones which Niebuhr selects. His theology is Paulinian, Augustinian, Calvinistic and Reformationist. All of these derive from sources other than the Hebraic." Levi A. Olan, *Op. cit.*, p. 122.

49. Emil L. Fackenheim, "Judaism, Christianity, and Reinhold Niebuhr: A Reply to Levi Olan," JUDAISM, vol. 5, no. 4, (Fall 1956): 316.

God, and that this is because all his powers (including his reason) are limited; and that they jointly oppose the contrary assertion of secularistic humanism.⁵⁰

Throughout the article, Fackenheim claimed that Judaism and Christianity were not identical, but that in certain aspects — which Niebuhr emphasized in his theology — they shared a common ground. He analyzed the differences between the two religions, but concluded that, precisely in his interpretation of human fall and redemption, Niebuhr caught the essence of the Jewish spirit. Both religions rejected a simple belief in progress through history, yet both brought God into history. Any interpretation of Isaiah's vision of redemption must accommodate the notion that "if the wolf is to dwell with the lamb, and the leopard to lie down with the kid, nature must not merely be improved but transmuted."⁵¹ It indicated that Judaism is not totally this-worldly, and Niebuhr's theology fully comprehended the meaning of this vision. On the other hand, Christianity, through Jesus, brought God into history and could not be wholly perceived as other-worldly. Because Judaism lets God enter into history but refuses to identify Him with history, it could be regarded as a viable foundation for a Christian existentialist like Reinhold Niebuhr.

The Jewish press, in general, welcomed Niebuhr's interpretation of Judaism. His close friendship with many Jews, his extreme anti-German position even before the Second World War, and his pro-Zionist outlook which he expressed in the middle of the War, explained the favorable treatment of his ideas by Jews.⁵² A leading Jewish intellectual like Will Herberg incorporated many elements of Niebuhr's theology in his writings and admitted that Reinhold Niebuhr not only stimulated his thought but also shaped and formed his general theological outlook.⁵³ Already in 1945, Milton Steinberg wrote favorably about Niebuhr in the Jewish paper, *Reconstructionist*, naming his article "Description and Appraisal." Niebuhr's reaffirmation of the reality of evil, in man and society, gave contemporaries — Jews and Christians — some clues in their attempt to grasp the horrors of their time. It preceded Hannah Arendt's profound insight and her brilliant explanation of the Banality of Evil. "This, many of us owe to Reinhold Niebuhr," wrote Steinberg; "he has reminded us of the depth and tenacity of evil in the individual and society."⁵⁴

50. Ibid., p. 318.

51. Ibid., p. 320.

52. See, for example, Seymour Siegel, "Reinhold Niebuhr, An Appreciation," *Conservative Judaism*, vol. xxv, no. 4 (Summer 1971): 57-63.

53. Will Herberg, *Judaism and Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1951), pp. x, 145-156, 182-189, 193-208, 211-236; *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, 1960, first published in 1955), pp. 254-262.

54. Milton Steinberg, "The Outlook of Reinhold Niebuhr," *The Reconstructionist*, vol. II, no. 10 (Dec. 14, 1945): 11.

Steinberg's account, however, could not bridge the gap between what he perceived as the pessimistic tone of Niebuhr's theology, and the joy, cheer, and hope of normative Judaism.

In rabbinic Judaism, the central position is held by God and His goodness, against which evil throws a shadow but from the periphery. In Calvinist Protestantism, God and His goodness are, needless to say, also placed in the key position — but it is evil, its root and flowerings, which get almost as much attention.⁵⁵

Niebuhr's concept of human depravity, asserted Steinberg, derived, therefore, more from Calvinism than from Judaism.

Rabbi Alexander Burnstein, of the Millinery Center Synagogue of New York City, further elaborated this topic. While expressing his admiration of Niebuhr's contribution to understanding the place and power of evil in man and society, he differentiated, nonetheless, between Niebuhr's viewpoint and that of the Jews. Granted, ominous forces of evil existed in the Bible within man and society; but, according to the Jewish interpretation of Scripture, greater still were the forces for good. "Should you say that the evil impulse is not in your power," said *Genesis Rabbah* 22, 15, "I [God] have declared unto you in Scripture, 'Unto thee is its desire, but thou mayest rule over it'." Similarly in *Sukkah* 52a,b, the rabbis asserted that "the truly great and upright men in history are those who have wrestled with the evil *Yetzer*. . . and have proved themselves the masters, and not the creature, of their *Yetzer*."⁵⁶ The differences were more subtle than mere pessimism versus optimism. Yet, insofar as Niebuhr's doctrine of sin underscored man's iniquity and spiritual impotence, and overlooks his capacity for overcoming evil, it differed from normative Judaism, concluded Burnstein.⁵⁷ It was left to the Jewish theologian, Abraham J. Heschel, a close friend of Niebuhr, to narrow this gap between the Calvinist and Judaic origins of Niebuhr's theology, and to vindicate, from a Jewish perspective, its basic affinity to the Hebraic sources.

Relying upon Biblical, Talmudic, Kabbalistic, and Hasidic writings, Heschel discussed the degree to which Niebuhr's doctrine of evil related to these sources of normative Judaism. Niebuhr's thought emphasized the mystery of evil in human life. He located evil not at the opposite pole of good but, rather, within good, and as an inherent part of human activity. Thus, said Heschel, according to Niebuhr, people have to be aware of the existence of evil precisely in their most idealistic and far-reaching aspirations, because that is what inevitably corrupts their most cherished and altruistic motives. Heschel claimed that Niebuhr's central problem was not the problem of sin or evil, but the problem of evil within

55. *Ibid.*, p. 14-15.

56. Alexander J. Burnstein, "Niebuhr, Scripture, and Normative Judaism" in Kegley and Bretall (eds.), *Reinhold Niebuhr, His Religious, Social and Political Thought* (New York: MacMillan), p. 423.

57. *Ibid.*, pp. 427-428.

good, the confusion of good and evil. Niebuhr had shown that the tragic aspect of human existence could not be reduced to biological deficiency or innate psychological flaws. It was, rather, an aspect of human will, human responsibility, and, therefore, belongs to the realm of human history.⁵⁸

Referring to various parts of the Old Testament, Heschel demonstrated that, with the exception of the first chapter of Genesis, the Bible always alludes to the intrinsic sorrow and evil of this world. In Isaiah and Jeremiah, Malachi and Psalms, Job and Ecclesiastes, one great cry resounds: the earth has been given into the hand of the wicked.⁵⁹ The Rabbinic and Kabbalistic interpretations of this phenomenon, despite various permutations, realized the full dimension of evil in the world, and, yet, viewed its existence not only as a threat and source of despair, but, also, as a challenge and source of hope. "It is precisely because of the task of fighting evil that life in this world is so preciously significant."⁶⁰ According to Heschel, pious Jews "realized quite well that the world was full of ordeals and dangers, that it contained Cain's jealousy of Abel, the cold malevolence of Sodom, and the hatred of Esau, but they also knew that there was in it the charity of Abraham and the tenderness of Rachel."⁶¹

The Hebraic Biblical tradition and its almost two thousand years of Rabbinic interpretation clearly showed that, in Judaism, all of history is perceived as a sphere in which good is mixed with evil. Consequently, the process of redemption consists of the human effort to separate good from evil. "Since evil can only exist parasitically on good, it will cease to be when the separation will be accomplished."⁶² Until such a time of total separation will arrive, paradox will constitute the essential way of understanding the world. According to the Jewish mystical tradition, tension, contrasts, ambiguities, and unresolved mysteries characterized all of reality. Kabbalistic, Hasidic, and, to a lesser degree, Orthodox rabbis, emphasize this phenomenon. "There is not a single *mizvah* which we fulfill perfectly," said *Midrash Tehillim*; "I am sixty years old, and I have not fulfilled one *mizvah*," admitted Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk to one of his disciples. For we perform them out of the desire for self-aggrandizement and for pride," commented Rabbi David Kimhi on Isaiah.⁶³ Hence, when Niebuhr claimed that evil is inextricably bound up with good, and warned against the human quest for perfection — because perversion and corruption of good exists at the heart of all

58. Abraham J. Heschel, "A Hebrew Evaluation of Reinhold Niebuhr," in Kegley and Bretall (eds.), *Reinhold Niebuhr, His Religious, Social and Political Thought*, pp. 393, 398-399.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 392, 395.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 398.

61. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's* (New York, 1950), p. 96.

62. Abraham J. Heschel, "A Hebrew Evaluation of Reinhold Niebuhr," p. 400.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 403.

human activities — he touched at the heart of the Jewish spirit. According to Heschel, Niebuhr's dialectic doctrine of evil is thus fully integrated within the mainstream of Jewish exegesis.

Niebuhr's analysis suggests that the possibilities of evil grow with the possibilities of good, and that every higher principle has new possibilities of evil within it. Thus, he elaborated an insight of which the Jewish tradition was aware. But when he moved from *the possibilities* of evil in the good into *the inevitability and necessity* of evil in good, he moved beyond the Hebraic tradition. According to Heschel, this aspect of Niebuhr's doctrine of evil was difficult to sustain from the Biblical point of view, because of the centrality of the covenant, the word of God, the commandments, the *mizvot*, which were imposed on man in the revelation of Sinai. Here, God gave the Jews the *mizvot*, the carrying out of sacred deeds, as a constant opportunity. Man was always exposed to sin, and his evil impulse prevented him from attaining perfection, but he is endowed through the *mizvot* with the ability to fulfill God's demands, at least to some large degree. Like Niebuhr, Judaism rejected the assumption of liberal Christianity that human nature could achieve what the Gospels demand, and Judaism similarly opposed the rationalistic Kantian axiom, "I ought, therefore I can." But, unlike Niebuhr, Judaism would claim that "Thou art commanded, therefore thou canst."⁶⁴ In that sense, concludes Heschel, observant Judaism differed from Niebuhr's concept of sin by being slightly more optimistic.

Like the Jewish press, most Christian liberal papers endorsed Niebuhr's attitude towards Judaism. Unlike the Jewish reaction, however, those who criticized his position did not reject his theological approach, which viewed Christianity as based on many Jewish sources. Rather, they demurred from Niebuhr's excessive empathy toward a religion which stressed its uniqueness, and which refused to be incorporated into Christianity. Hence, the logics of Jewish and Christian reservations concerning Niebuhr's theology were similar. Some Orthodox Jews condemned him in the name of Jewish particularism, while some pietist Christians reprimanded him in the name of Christian universalism. To the former, he was somehow a gentile intruder; to the latter, he was a defeatist who refused to assert the superiority of Christianity over its Jewish origins, since he opposed the validity of the Christian Gospel for the Jews.

Indeed, Niebuhr's negative position toward Christian missionary activities *vis à vis* the Jews, and his constant call for a recognition of the autonomy of Judaism, angered some of his contemporaries. The most bitter reaction came from former Jews who converted to Christianity. Victor Buksbazen of Philadelphia, the vice president of the International Hebrew Christian Alliance of London, who was born to Jew-

64. Ibid., p. 409.

ish parents in Poland and accepted Christianity in 1922, wrote a polemical essay against Niebuhr in *Christianity Today* of December 1958. First, he tried to prove that Niebuhr's statement about the futility of missionary activities among Jews was wrong. He claimed that, in the last 150 years, when Christianity moved away from its medieval arrogance, it succeeded amazingly well among Jews throughout Europe, Africa, Palestine, and the American continent. Not providing any statistics, Buksbazen argued that "those acquainted with the history of Jewish missions have estimated that, proportionately, conversions to Christ among the Jews have far outnumbered conversions from other religions to Christianity."⁶⁵ Calling these converts Jewish Christians or Hebrew Christians, Buksbazen stated that "there is hardly a major city in the Western world without a substantial group" of Jewish believers in Jesus.⁶⁶

When Buksbazen reacted to Niebuhr's second assertion that missionizing as an ideal was wrong, he drifted toward a moralistic stance that accused Niebuhr of betrayal of the Christian faith. In a highly critical and simplistic tone, devoid of Niebuhr's dialectical analysis of the two faiths, he concluded that Niebuhr's anti-missionary position mocked the essence of the New Testament, and turned the Christian faith into a delusion. "If Niebuhr is right, then Christ and his apostles were wrong," he noted, ending his essay with a prophecy of wrath: "When Christians stop being missionaries they will stop being Christians."⁶⁷

George E. Sweazey expressed a subtler reaction to Niebuhr's anti-missionary viewpoint. Writing in the *Christian Century*, he argued that, precisely because he agreed with Niebuhr's position towards Judaism, he could not accept his anti-missionary conclusion. The Jews of the modern world, especially in America, had abandoned their traditional way of life. Therefore, claimed Sweazey, according to the standards of normative Judaism, many Jews in America scarcely have a religion. "They seem as unlikely to find God through the Torah as through the cross. Even those who cherish a strong sense of the Judaic tradition often seem to hold it as a sort of super-intense patriotism, without personal awareness of the God or the religious teachings of their forefathers."⁶⁸ Hence, Reinhold Niebuhr, whose goal was to strengthen the religious, monotheistic message to the modern world by his theology, should not ignore the Jewish people, whose irreligious tendency seemed similar to those of the Gentiles. Any serious thinker who is worried

65. Victor Buksbazen, "Niebuhr and the Gospel for the Jew," *Christianity Today*, vol. 3, no. 5 (December 1958): 10.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

68. George E. Sweazey, "Are Jews Intended to be Christians," *Christian Century*, vol. 76, no. 17 (April 29, 1959): 514.

about the secularization of modern life must be concerned when any group of people finds its religion irrelevant, meaningless, or simply difficult to observe. "Religiously we all are Jews," wrote Sweazey. "It is intolerable that we should abandon those to whom we owe so much just at the border of our Promised Land."⁶⁹

Moreover, Sweazey argued, an anti-missionary position among Christians increases the sense of guilt among new converts. Such a position was morally bankrupt from a Christian, as well as a Jewish, point of view, since it undermined the value of brotherhood and friendship among human beings. "Many who have accepted Christianity, from the first disciples to the most recent converts in foreign lands, have risked a sense of guilt in abandoning their fellows to join an alien group."⁷⁰ A missionary stance will help to obliterate these feelings by stressing that an affirmation of Jesus is the fulfilment and not the betrayal of the special Jewish mission. George Sweazey ended his essay by recalling Rabbi Stephen S. Wise's comment that "only one influence or force in the world will ever move Jews to reclaim (sic) Jesus as their very own . . . namely, the true, devout, brotherly practice of Christianity."⁷¹

As I mentioned already, when Niebuhr declared that Christians must recognize the authentic autonomy of the Jews, he based it not only on his theological interpretation, but also on a historical analysis of Christian-Jewish relations. He began by demonstrating the linkage between the faiths by their similar attitude toward social justice, history, man's responsibility, and messianic expectations. He emphasized what he defined as the anti-mysticism and, conversely, the anti-utopianism of both faiths, which prevented them from other-worldly quietism and despair on the one hand, and this-worldly sentimentalism and illusion on the other hand.⁷² Then, he moved to a historical analysis, and claimed that the Pauline hope for universal conversion had, throughout history, demanded too high a price for the Jews.⁷³ Niebuhr certainly had anti-Semitism in mind when he asserted that, historically, such a universalistic quest for conversion increased, rather than attenuated, religious animosities.

The Reverend David M. Stowe, Associate General Secretary for Overseas Ministries, bitterly reacted to this argument. In a letter to the editors of *Christianity and Crisis*, he objected to any identification between missionary activities on the one hand, and religious propagation of anti-Semitism on the other. "In what sense does missionary activity conflict with a full recognition of the greatness and autonomy of Jewish re-

69. Ibid., p. 515.

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid., p. 516.

72. Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Unsolved Religious Problem in Christian-Jewish Relations," *Christianity and Crisis*, vol. 16, no. 21 (Dec. 12, 1966): 279-283.

73. Ibid., p. 282.

ligion?" he asked rhetorically. Asserting that Niebuhr never opposed missionary activity in the Moslem or Buddhist world, on the ground that it might foster racial hatred, he wondered why such an activity among Jews might increase anti-Semitism.⁷⁴

A brief reply by Niebuhr summed up the essence of his theological position towards Judaism: "We do not incorporate the sacred song of Hinduism in our psalter, nor do we worship either the god of Hindu pantheism or the many gods of Hindu polytheism. We take our social standards from Isaiah, Amos and the prophets of Israel. We do not, God be thanked, declare holy wars in the name of Allah of the Koran."⁷⁵ The words "social standards" hinted at Niebuhr's reasoning. As long as Christianity takes its social standards from Judaism and, at the same time, attempts to convert Jews to Christianity, it implies that the Jews as a people have deviated from the standards of Judaism. Perhaps Christian missions for the Jews do not conflict with a recognition of the greatness and autonomy of the Jewish religion, but they embody a condescending attitude towards Jews as a people *manqué*, who would completely live the high standards of their religion only by accepting the Christian gospel. Such a theological framework shelters covert or even overt anti-Semitism.

Niebuhr's fight against anti-Semitism deserves a separate analysis, which is beyond the scope of this paper.⁷⁶ Suffice it to note in this context that his rejection of missionary activities stemmed not only from his theological analysis of the dialectical relations between the two faiths, but also from his profound insight into the social and political consequences of such activities. His entire approach towards Judaism demonstrated the historical and "contextual" nature of his theology. The dialectical relations between the two religions served not only to strengthen the Hebraic spirit and the prophetic tradition of Christianity, but also to strengthen and foster real tolerance and understanding among the adherents of the two faiths. Thus, he should be viewed as a leading religious thinker, one who profoundly elaborated (and praised) the interdependence of both religions of the Judeo-Christian tradition without merging them into one identical creed.

74. David M. Stowe, "Mission to the Jews," *Christianity and Crisis*, vol. 27, no. 1 (Feb. 6, 1967): 12, 14.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

76. During the thirties and forties, Niebuhr wrote and talked in public on the subject. See, for example, "Germany Must Be Told," *Christian Century*, vol. 50, no. 32 (August 9, 1933): 1014-1015; "Anti-Semitism," *Radical Religion*, vol. 3, no. 3 (Summer 1938): 5; "The Plight of the Jews," *Radical Religion*, vol. 3, no. 4 (Fall 1938): 8-9; "Jews After the War," *The Nation*, Feb. 21, 1942 and Feb. 28, 1942; "Jews and Gentiles," *The Nation*, vol. 154, no. 23 (June 6, 1942): 659-660.

Beyond the Congregation: The Need for a Pattern of Personal Prayer

LAWRENCE A. ENGLANDER

I IMAGINE THAT CONCERT MUSICIANS derive a great deal of satisfaction from their work. The full sound of the orchestra and the thrill of the audience response must give at least as much pleasure to the performer as to those who listen. But over and above concert appearances, one would also expect any good musician to enjoy private moments alone with the instrument and the music. Not only would the artist practice pieces for public performance, but he or she would probably also play melodies never intended for the public ear — strictly for personal enjoyment.

Just as this notion is true for music, so does it apply to the art of prayer. Even though congregational worship can provide a great deal of communal support as well as aesthetic beauty, we can also become enriched by moments of solitary communion with God. Our classical sources are aware of the different needs met by public and private prayer. The Babylonian Talmud¹ records that when Rabbi Akiva led the congregation in worship, he proceeded concisely, in order not to overburden the community; but when he prayed by himself, he would prostrate himself and roll from one end of the room to the other. With prayer, as with music, one's freest, most uninhibited expression comes in solitude.

Unfortunately, for many Jews today the experience of prayer is relegated to the concert hall. Some pray with the congregation, blending their music with the rest of the orchestra, only to return the instrument to its case until the next concert. Others, even when attending a service, feel themselves to be more spectators in the audience than participants in the symphony.

There is probably a host of reasons why Jewish worship, for many, has become more communal and less personal an activity. But the end result is that the individual finds oneself a step further removed from the pursuit of *kedushah*; such distance causes this pursuit to appear fruitless or irrelevant. This state of affairs has provoked Zalman Schachter-Shalomi to lament:

Judaism and all the other western religions are suffering from having become oververbalized and underexperienced. Someone else's description of ecstasy or spiritual at-one-ness, given second- or third-hand, is not enough.

1. BT *Berakhot* 31a; see also *Tos. Berakhot* 3:6.

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I wanted to have the experience myself . . . That is what a living, breathing religion is about.²

Levels of Personal Prayer

Are there ways in which *tefilah beyahid* (private prayer) can be restored as a natural and desirable complement to *tefilah bezibbur* (public prayer)? In order to explore this question, we first need a clear definition of what is meant by personal prayer. To describe this term, the list below is presented in an order which, in my opinion, calls for increasing levels of *kavanah* and skill.

1. **Home observance of Shabbat and Festivals, through the recitation of *berakhot* surrounding the meal.** Assuming that one is accompanied by family and/or friends, this level of prayer is not strictly personal. Nevertheless, the participants generate their own worship environment rather than being directed by a prayer leader, such as in the synagogue.

2. **Daily recitation of *berakhot* for specific occasions.** There is a variety of short blessings which can be said before partaking of food, and there is even a succinct, five-word formula that can be substituted for the longer version of the blessing after meals.³ *Birkhot hanehenin* and *birkhot hashahar* also give the Jew regular opportunities to offer personal thanks and praise. All these can be recited silently, on one's own. Without interrupting the demands of the daily appointment schedule, this practice can bring a new spiritual awareness into it.

3. **Individual recitation of the canonized worship service.** For some, this entails prayer from the *siddur* of one's choice each morning, afternoon and/or evening — albeit without the prayers reserved for a *minyan*. For others, a daily *kriat Sh'ma* or recitation of a traditional prayer would be a way to pursue this step.

4. **Personal prayers or meditations.** Over and above the traditional service, there are several means of individual expression in prayer. For example, kabbalistic texts offer *kavanot* as spurs to personal prayer; these may employ word combinations, physical postures or mental concentration techniques.⁴ There are other meditation exercises which can enhance *tefilah beyahid*; now that these exercises are being used with greater frequency in the corporate office and the athletic field,⁵ perhaps we can encourage restoring them to their original setting.

2. *The First Step* (New York: Bantam, 1983), pp. 6-7.

3. BT *Berakhot* 40b.

4. See, e.g., Aryeh Kaplan, *Meditation and Kabbalah* (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1982); Moshe Idel, "Mystical Techniques," *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 74-111; idem, "Hitbodedut as Concentration in Ecstatic Kabbalah," *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), pp. 103-169.

5. See, e.g., Robert J. Krieger and Marilyn H. Krieger, *The C Zone: Peak Performance Under Pressure* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), written for harried people in the business world. Also, in Irving Dardik and Denis Waitley, *Quantum Fitness* (New York: Pocket

Parallels With Congregational Worship

The challenge, then, is to encourage participants in congregational worship to bolster their experiences in the sanctuary with personal occasions of addressing God. In this regard, we are aided immeasurably by Lawrence Hoffman's recent research into the dynamics of congregational liturgy.⁶ Rabbi Hoffman begins by showing us that communal prayer has not only a theological dimension but a social one as well:

Whatever worshippers presume to say to God, they are at the same time directing a message to themselves. The very act of worship takes on the function of identifying for the worshipper what it is that he or she stands for, what real life is like, what his or her aspirations are. The liturgical medium becomes the message.⁷

Hoffman claims that to understand the dynamics of Jewish worship, one must look "beyond the text" of the prayer itself and consider the congregation who is praying it. The same prayer may take on radically different meanings to congregations divided either by history or by social milieu. In short, the identity of the congregation influences the interpretation of the liturgy.

Hoffman indicates three benchmarks which reflect a congregation's self-identification. First is the *cultural backdrop* which sets the congregation in time and place. Second is the *master image* of God which is presented in the liturgy; this image will be consistent with the cultural backdrop and will, in turn, determine the means by which God is addressed. This brings us to the third factor, *synecdochal vocabulary*. By this term, Hoffman means not only the words of prayer but also the aesthetic features which play a role in the unfolding of a service, such as the architecture of the sanctuary, the music and the style of language.

Then Hoffman describes the above three factors in the life of contemporary North American society (which we shall examine shortly). Finally, he stresses that if prayer is to be meaningful to the modern Jewish congregation — or, for that matter, to the practitioners of any religion — it must be relevant to the way that they perceive the world, as reflected by the above three benchmarks.

Though Hoffman's focus is upon the community, it seems to me that his approach can work just as well on a personal level. Thus, by applying Hoffman's analysis to the issue of personal prayer, we may be able to go not only "beyond the text" but also *beyond the congregation* in order to address the spiritual needs of the individual.

We begin with today's cultural backdrop. Hoffman outlines the transition from the German high culture of the nineteenth century to the pop-

Books, 1984), chap. 2, the authors describe exercises which they have employed with American Olympic athletes.

6. L. Hoffman, *Beyond the Text* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), and *The Art of Public Prayer* (Washington, DC: Pastoral Press, 1988).

7. L. Hoffman, *Beyond the Text*, p. 69.

ular culture of contemporary North America. Unlike our predecessors who sought clear distinctions between people of different social stature, our society stresses equality and accessibility. Therefore, concludes Hoffman, our modern services must also be communal and accessible to the common person.

This may be feasible on a congregational level, where those who are more proficient at prayer can guide and integrate those who are less familiar with the service; but how can an individual who is not conversant with the dynamics of the liturgy hope to incorporate prayer into her or his personal life?

It might help us to draw an analogy with Hasidism, which is often regarded as the epitome of Judaism for the common person. We are familiar with Hasidic tales about simple shepherds or peasants who enter the synagogue and, unable to follow the service, praise God by blowing upon a whistle. Surely this means that God accepts the prayers even of the ignorant, as long as they are offered with sincerity! But Louis Jacobs suggests that the conclusion might be otherwise:

It is true that there are Hasidic tales about the Baal Shem Tov and his followers refusing to reject the prayers of the untutored, but such tales are not peculiar to Hasidism and are found even among the Lurianic Kabbalists who certainly favoured . . . highly sophisticated techniques of contemplation in prayer. These tales mean no more than that the leaders of the movement, with their stress on inwardness and concern for the masses, believed that God accepted every true prayer even if it was confused and in error. But this was because nothing higher could have been expected from the heroes of these tales. The Hasid, if he was capable of it, was expected to rise to much higher realms in his prayers, and for him the simple prayer was most emphatically not enough.⁸

The ignorant and untutored are welcome to join the quest for spiritual fulfillment, but the quest does not end with them. And although communal worship is a staple of Hasidic life, it is fortified by the energy which each Hasid brings from his or her private moments of prayer — moments which require a rigorous discipline.

In fact, does not our cultural backdrop of accessibility extend to the individual, encouraging people to teach *themselves* specialized skills that range from physical fitness to computer programs? Would it come as any surprise, then, to discover that prayer, too, is a discipline which requires practice? Jews in the Western world today, by and large, are anything but untutored. They are well-educated and highly motivated to learn those skills which they find personally meaningful. If they can be challenged with the skills of *tefilah beyahid* in a way which makes these skills both relevant and accessible to the individual, I suspect that many will be ready and eager to learn.

Next we come to the **master image** of God which is presented in the

8. Louis Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 34.

liturgy. In the earlier part of this century, religious Jews and Christians were moved by the transcendent image of the “numinous” God as described by Rudolf Otto:⁹ in prayer, the worshipper senses God’s “absolute overpoweringness” and thereby becomes conscious of her or his “creaturehood.” But now, claims Hoffman, most of our contemporaries stress the intimate aspects of God. Thus, we tend to find the divine presence less in the distant heavens and more in the midst of community — and even within the self:

[O]ur time in general has replaced projection with introjection as its dominant mode of picturing the world. By that I mean that our cosmology is relatively impoverished in terms of extrahuman but not-yet divine beings like angels and demons, whereas we have no trouble at all speaking about internal constructs like an id, ego and superego . . . No wonder then that God is seen by many today not only to be intimately involved in the community, . . . but even more — immanent in each human being.¹⁰

This master image of the God within certainly squares with our cultural backdrop of equality and accessibility. However, it also presents a problem: it is all too easy to confuse the spiritual with the psychological. In an age which so highly values individual initiative and personal autonomy, we run the danger of subsuming God into an aspect of the Self. The problem then is: how is such a God addressed? If God is equivalent to the inner voice of conscience (and nothing more), why would it be necessary to set aside particular times, with special language, to address this component of our own personality? While cherishing the immanent nature of God, it is also important to reach out to God’s transcendent nature as well.

Again, a reference to the Hasidic tradition may be of assistance. A story relates that a pious Hasid complained to the Baal Shem Tov, “I have dedicated myself to prayer and study in service of the Eternal, but after all this I find that I am an ordinary and ignorant person.” The Baal Shem Tov replied, “To gain the insight that you are ordinary and ignorant is in itself a worthy accomplishment.”¹¹

At first glance, one can interpret this story as a put-down of an arrogant individual. Yet the story gives us no indication that the Hasid was deserving of such a reprimand; furthermore, this approach is somewhat out of character for the Baal Shem Tov, who was renowned for his compassion. Rather, this anecdote seems quite in keeping with the Hasidic doctrine of *bitul ha-yesh*. According to this teaching, the ideal of the spiritual quest is to subsume one’s own ego into the divine identity; the personal soul achieves fulfillment when it merges with the cosmic Soul of Souls.

A great deal of time is spent these days — and, for some, a great deal

9. *The Idea of the Holy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923).

10. L. Hoffman, *The Art of Public Prayer*, pp. 176-7.

11. Leib Abraham, *Midrash Rivesh Tov* (Hungary, 1927), 1:106.

of money — in analyzing and understanding the self. But we may be well advised also to spend attention on placing that self into a universal perspective, to realize our relative personal importance (or insignificance) with regard to other selves in space and time. One way to achieve this is through personal prayer. By reaching for dialogue in solitude, without the buffer of a congregation, we can appreciate more readily that God is far more than an extension of our ego, either personal or collective. Such a process brings a humility which, by limiting the ego, helps to define it more clearly.

If the contemporary cultural backdrop and the master image of God emphasize intimacy and accessibility, this is certainly true of the synecdochal vocabulary of congregational worship. Hoffman describes the trend in recent synagogue architecture toward amphitheatre-style seating around a central pulpit, rather than straight rows facing an elevated proscenium platform. Synagogues whose services are led by professional musicians are also encouraging more congregational chanting of simple, familiar melodies.¹² Such “choreographical” features serve to enhance the feeling of community which is created by the participants.

The problem, however, is that these features can be so attractive that they become ends in themselves. The prayers can be so stirring, the melodies so moving and the sense of togetherness so enveloping that the participant might wish to recreate the experience regularly — but without a thought toward communicating with God!

Here, too, the Hasidic tradition anticipates our quandary. The Baal Shem Tov told of a king who dwelt in a magnificent palace and who invited all of his subjects to visit him.¹³ Among the many who flocked to the capital, some reacted negatively to the guards posted at the gates, and turned away. Others entered the palace but became distracted by the splendid halls and ornate furnishings. Only a few persisted through the palace until they gained an audience with the monarch. So it is with prayer. Some people are turned off by the “institutionalized” nature of worship and decide not to participate. Others become caught up in the aesthetic aspects of the service and neglect to pray.

Personal prayer may not bring us into the throne room every time, but it can remind us why we are exploring the palace. Giving ourselves time to concentrate on prayer, without having to keep pace with the congregation, may enable the liturgy to achieve an even greater impact.

12. The Reform movement has done extensive research into this phenomenon. See, e.g., Sanford Seltzer, *Worship and Ritual Patterns of Reform Congregations*, published recently by the UAHCCAR Commission on Religious Living; and the 1987 survey (as yet unpublished) by the Joint Commission on Synagogue Music.

13. *Midrash Rivesh Tov* 2:90-91. My interpretation of the parable differs slightly from the original.

Conclusion

This exposition has attempted to demonstrate that the experience of congregational worship will be enhanced for those individuals who engage in moments of private prayer, and that there is a receptivity to this claim among our contemporaries. A simple litmus test of the truth of these statements is to see what happens when Jewish spiritual leaders actively present a role model of *tefilah beyahid*. To return to our initial metaphor, perhaps we can persuade some musicians to pick up their instrument in privacy and try a few melodies. Then, when they return to their place in the orchestra, we should not be surprised if the music which they help to create is all the more sublime.

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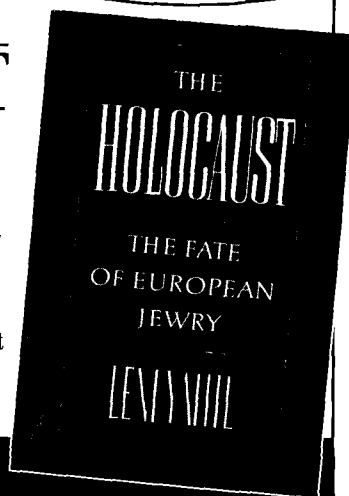
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Covenant, Conversion and Chosenness: Maimonides and Halevi On “Who Is A Jew?”

BARUCH FRYDMAN-KOHL

I

ONE OF THE RECURRING POLITICAL DEBATES in the State of Israel is over the language and intent of the Law of Return. Enacted in 1950, and considered one of the Basic Laws of the Jewish State, the Law of Return defines Jewish identity for the purpose of immediate citizenship. Conflicts have centered on proposals that the Law of Return be amended, in reference to conversion, to define as Jews only those individuals converted “in accordance with Jewish law.” Many, both within and outside of the State of Israel, viewed this amendment as more than an attempt to clarify an ambiguous clause which affected only a few people each year. This amendment was perceived to be a symbolic statement about the nature of the Jewish people and the legitimacy of non-Orthodox forms of Judaism.¹

Since all groups differentiate between themselves and others (“us” and “them”), how someone crosses the border is significant to the self-understanding of the reference group. Thus, the Israeli political dispute may also be seen as a contemporary marker in a longstanding theological debate concerning the nature of the Jewish people and its receptivity to individuals who choose to become Jews. In a similar manner, a medieval debate over the concept of the election of Israel also focused on the nature of conversion to Judaism. That was the case even though there were comparatively few conversions in the Middle Ages. Precisely because it was a liminal experience, conversion assumed a symbolic significance.

The issue of the nature of the covenant also was sharpened in the Middle Ages because of social interaction with non-Jews and competing

1. The conflict following the November, 1988 Knesset elections is described by Edward Norden, “Behind ‘Who is a Jew’,” *Commentary*, April, 1989. For the antecedents to the most recent debate, see Moshe Samet, “Who is a Jew? (1958-1977)” and “Who is a Jew? (1978-1985),” *Jerusalem Quarterly*, nos. 36 (pp. 88-108) and 37 (pp. 109-139).

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claims by other religious traditions.² External competition necessitated internal clarification and justification. Just as Harry A. Wolfson often viewed Moses Maimonides and Yehudah Halevi as archetypes for different approaches to critical problems in Jewish religious thought, so we shall examine the differences between these thinkers regarding the nature of the Jewish people and its formative history.³

Although the belief in the election of Israel is rooted in the Biblical conception of Israel as the “treasure” of God, even in the Bible the nature of chosenness is subject to debate. Genesis and the Psalms of Zion declare the relationship between God and Israel to be absolute and irrevocable, while Deuteronomy describes that relationship to be conditional.⁴ In rabbinic literature, a similar tension can be felt in the discussion between two 2nd century rabbis as to whether the people of Israel are viewed as children of God even when they violate God’s covenant. In discussing this dispute, Ephraim Urbach characterizes it as illustrative of tension between “cosmic-eternal election” and an “historical-relativistic” approach. David Hartman has suggested that the debate is between a relational or formal attitude toward the covenant. Both Urbach and Hartman acknowledge that, imbedded deep within the classical expression of Judaism, is a conflict about the nature of chosenness.⁵

Contemporary scholarly explorations of the history of conversion to Judaism have noted similar internal tension. In the Biblical period, conversion was inconceivable on national and theological grounds. After the

2. On the social context of Jewish-Christian relations, see Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* (New York: Behrman House, 1961), and Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1979). For the theological context, see Daniel Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 1977), and David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1979).

3. Harry Wolfson’s first published essay on the history of Jewish philosophy dealt with Halevi and Maimonides. He later devoted numerous essays to exploring the differences between these two thinkers. See his *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, (2 vols.) (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973-77).

4. See Exodus 19:5, Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2, and 26:18. However, contrast the stipulations and conditionality of other verses in Deuteronomy with the open-ended nature of the promises to Abraham (e.g. Gen. 15) and the theology of Davidic authority (e.g., Psalms 2, 17, 20, 21). I take the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants to be similar in that both are unconditional. On the distinction between Deuteronomy and Abraham/David, see Delbert Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), pp. 98-119, Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Vol. 1 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1957), pp. 308-324, 334, 347, and John Bright, *A History of Israel*, second edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), pp. 220-223. However, Jon Levenson, *Sinai and Zion* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), observes that the covenant with David does not exempt him or his house from the mandates of Sinai (p. 99), and that these two traditions complement one another (p. 209).

5. Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages, Their Concepts and Beliefs*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1979), pp 525-541 (Hebrew: pp 469-475). David Hartman, *A Living Covenant* (New York: Free Press, 1985), p. 326.

Maccabean revolt, we see its acceptance and advocacy. By the 4th century, conversion is politically undesirable. The national-ethnic roots of Biblical Israel and rabbinic Judaism are often at variance with their universal orientation. Even today, the tension between the orientations of kinship and consent may be seen in various expressions of Judaism.⁶

To determine the opinions of Maimonides and Halevi regarding the nature of covenant, conversion and chosenness, their respective historiographies of three critical events that are recounted in the Torah will be examined. Maimonides and Halevi will be shown to have vastly different explanations about Abraham's awareness of God and his transmission of monotheism, the behavior of the Israelites during Egyptian bondage, and the incident of the Golden Calf. In this examination, Maimonides will be shown to hold that *Judaism* is a philosophical community with common beliefs that entail common practices and hence, open to all who wish to join, while Halevi will be seen to describe the *Jews* as a unique ethnic group which others may join, but in which converts are still distinct.

This tentative conclusion will be tested further in the light of Maimonides' and Halevi's opinions regarding the possibility of prophecy for someone born a non-Jew. One of Maimonides' halakhic rulings about converts will be shown to dovetail with his theological understanding of covenant. This will confirm the reading of those students of Maimonides who claim that his theological- philosophical opinions and his legal writings were conceptually integrated. Finally, this essay will highlight some of the ways in which Judaism views itself and "the Other."

6. On the history of conversion to Judaism, see Barnard Bamberger, *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period* (New York: Ktav, rept. 1968). More recently, Shaye J.D. Cohen, "From the Bible to the Talmud: The Prohibition of Inter-marriage," *Hebrew Annual Review* 7 (1983): 23-39, and "The Origins of the Matrilineal Principle in Rabbinic Law," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 10 (1985): 19-53, and Lawrence Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew?* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1985), offer an extensive discussion of rabbinic law regarding Jews by birth and by choice. Daniel Elazar explores the political dimensions of contemporary voluntaristic Judaism in his *Kinship and Consent* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1983). Arnold Eisen, *The Chosen People in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), analyzes attempts of American Jewish thinkers to integrate the idea of chosenness with that of American democratic traditions. The decision of the Reform Movement to accept either patrilineal or matrilineal descent as determinative of Jewish identity *if there is a formal religious education* is clearly an effort to move away from the ethnic basis of Judaism. The rejection of this approach by the Conservative and Orthodox Movements should be read not merely as an affirmation of precedent in Jewish law, but also as a commitment to the primacy of the biological basis of the Jewish people. A sophisticated theology which recognizes the ethnicity of the Jews is Michael Wyschogrod's *The Body of Faith* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983). Contemporary sociological writing notes the ongoing tension for converts to Judaism between the theology and obligations of Judaism and the ethnicity of the Jewish people. See Egon Mayer, *Love and Tradition* (New York: Plenum Press, 1985), Paul and Rachel Cowan, *Mixed Blessings* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), and Susan Weidman Schneider, *Intermarriage* (New York: Free Press, 1989).

II

Yehudah Halevi, a Spanish poet, physician, and philosopher of the 11th and 12th centuries, is one of the most widely quoted Jewish thinkers of the Middle Ages. His love for the Jewish people and the land of Israel, along with his devotion to a God of will and passion, made his *Kuzari* a popular and readily understandable tract. Alexander Altmann has described the *Kuzari* as “the most moving document of faith in the destiny of Israel produced in the Middle Ages.”⁷

In the *Kuzari*, subtitled *The Book of Refutation and Proof in Defense of the Despised Faith*, Halevi sought to defend Judaism against the rival truth claims of Islam, Christianity and Aristotelian philosophy. These other religions had surpassed Judaism in terms of political power, and had developed theological arguments to explain the comparative powerlessness of the Jewish people. Christianity claimed to be the “new Israel” which had continued the spiritual legacy of the ancient, physical Israel. In this theological perspective, biological lineage was secondary to spiritual heritage: Christianity becomes Jacob and Judaism embodies Esau.⁸ Islam contended that it was the true bearer of the word of God, since the prophecy of Muhammed superseded that of Moses and the prophets of Israel. Philosophers argued that truth was to be discovered by rational inquiry; descent had no bearing on the outcome of speculation. Halevi’s defense of Judaism claimed that spiritual and intellectual truths were intertwined with genealogy. The covenant, which involves belief and behavior, was maintained by an unbroken genetic linkage to Abraham and Adam. Thus, physical and spiritual Israel were to be considered one phenomenon.

Halevi’s Rabbi in the *Kuzari* begins his discourse by affirming “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, who brought the Children of Israel out of Egypt.” When asked by the King of the Khazars why he did not begin by speaking of the universal God of creation, the Rabbi explains that everyone, including Christians and Moslems, concedes that God has participated in the history and redemption of the Jewish people. Since this redemptive act is an historical certainty, all other beliefs — the covenant, the Torah, the divine nature of the people — are founded upon that rock. The King draws the conclusion that the Jews have an exclusive revelation in which no Gentile may partake. Halevi builds this historical uniqueness upon the biological singularity of the seed of Abraham.

In contrast, Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, who achieved fame as a physician, halakhist, communal leader, and philosopher, emphasizes the cov-

7. “Leo Baeck and the Jewish Mystical Tradition,” in *Essays in Jewish Intellectual History* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England for Brandeis University Press, 1981), p. 307.

8. On the use of Esau and Jacob in medieval polemical literature, see Gerson Cohen, “Esau as a Symbol in Early Medieval Thought,” in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

enantal exclusiveness of the Jews in the context of a universal awareness of one God. His “passionate love of God”⁹ recognizes a role for Christianity and Islam in bringing the world closer to God. Thus, in the uncensored text of his *Mishneh Torah*, he wrote:

It is beyond the human mind to fathom the designs of the Creator. Our ways are not His ways, nor are our thoughts His thoughts. All the events [related to Jesus] and even those related to the Ishmaelite who succeeded him [Muhammed], were nothing more than preparing the way for the messianic King . . . [Because of their followers,] the entire world has been filled with the doctrine of the Messiah, the Torah and the commandments. These teachings have been spread to distant islands and among many people, uncircumcized of heart and flesh. They discuss these matters and the commandments of the Torah. Some declare that the commandments were true, but have lost their validity and are no longer required. Others assert that there is an esoteric meaning in them and that they are not to be taken literally, since the Messiah has already come and revealed their hidden significance. But when the true messianic King will appear and succeed, they will immediately recant and recognize the falseness of their assertions. (*Laws of Kings* 9:4)

According to Maimonides, Christians and Moslems did not possess true beliefs. Indeed, in his *Letter to Yemen*, he calls them “lifeless effigies,” but, however deficient, their monotheism did serve to prepare humanity for an acceptance of a full monotheism. The spread of these religions was seen by Maimonides as having a functionally good purpose.¹⁰ Judaism was understood as the best, but not the exclusive way to God. For Maimonides, correct beliefs and actions rather than biology are crucial in one’s relationship with God. Indeed, the initial chapters of his *Mishneh Torah*, while articulating the basis for a monotheistic faith, do not even mention the people of Israel.¹¹

This distinction between biology and belief may also be seen in the “history” that each thinker offers of the transmission of monotheism.

9. David Hartman, *Maimonides: Torah and the Philosophic Quest* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1977), p. 191. Georges Vajda and his disciple, David Blumenthal, have written about philosophic piety as a form of mysticism which stresses intellectual contemplation as a way of devotion. See Vajda, *Introduction à la Pensée Juive du Moyen Age* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1947), and Blumenthal, *Understanding Jewish Mysticism*, vol. 1 (NY: Ktav, 1978), and *Approaches to Judaism in the Medieval Period* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984).

10. Regarding Maimonides’ views on Christianity and Islam, see Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (NY: Oxford, 1989). For Maimonides, even the seven Noahide Laws were not simply an expression of universal reason. Because of their legislative quality, they had to be accepted as mandated by God. See *Responsa* #148. Also note David Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism* (NY: Mellen, 1983), as well as José Faur, *Iyyunim be’Mishneh Torah la’Rambam* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1980), p. 150.

11. Lawrence Kaplan, “Maimonides on the Singularity of the Jewish People,” *Daat* (1984): v-xxvii, argues that Maimonides sees two stages in religion: monotheism, which is universal and attainable by speculation, and revelation, which is exclusive and reserved for the People of Israel. Thus, the initial chapters of the *Mishneh Torah*, which are metaphysical in content, do not speak of Israel. Only when discussing the particular forms of human expression of love for God, does Maimonides mention the People of Israel.

While both Halevi and Maimonides viewed Abraham as a unique individual with a special connection to God, they differed in their account of how this status came to be. According to Halevi, this unique metaphysical status had a biological base:

Adam . . . received the soul in its perfection, the intellect in the highest degree possible for human nature, and the divine power after the intellect; I mean the level by means of which one may have contact with God . . . and know spiritual truths without learning [them], but by means of the least thought . . . He gave birth to many children, but not one of them was fit to stand in his place except Abel, for only he resembled Adam. After Cain killed his brother out of jealousy over this attribute, it was transmitted to Seth . . . who became the chosen one of Adam and his seed. But the other children were just chaff. The singular possession of Seth was his son Enoch. So this *Amr* [word, or thing; the term takes on different meanings in different contexts] continued through Noah, through individuals who were like seeds. . . . So it continued in the generations from Noah to Abraham . . . The singular possession of Abraham from among his sons was Isaac; therefore, he sent away all his other children from the singular land, the Land of Canaan . . . The singular possession of Isaac was Jacob, so he distanced his brother Esau . . . However, the children of Jacob were all singular . . . From that moment, the Divine *Amr*, which had been limited to individuals, rested on the group . . . Even though there were sinners and despisers of God among them, . . . there is no doubt that from this perspective, even they [the sinners] were singular. Their roots and nature came from this singularity, and they would, in the future, produce children who would be singular. (*Kuzari* 1:95)

The special nature of the Jewish People derives from selective spiritual eugenics, beginning after Adam. The “chaff” was winnowed away, while the special divine “seed” continued without disruption through righteous individuals like Abraham.¹²

Maimonides also imagined that humanity was originally monotheistic. However, in his *Mishneh Torah*, he indicated that a fall from that initial state occurred early in the history of the human race, and monotheism was re-initiated by Abraham, *through reason*:

In the days of Enosh, people committed a great and grievous mistake . . . They began to build temples to the stars and to offer them sacrifices . . . Over a long period, the exalted and awesome name of God was forgotten by all creatures and [lost] to their consciousness . . . Until the pillar of the world was born, that is Abraham our father. Once this saviour was of age, he began to speculate. He was little, but he began to think day and night . . . until he found the true path and comprehended the correct line with correct reason . . . He knew that the entire world had erred . . . At the age of forty years, Abraham recognized his Creator. Once he recognized and knew [God], he began to respond to questions in Ur Casdim and to argue with them . . . He began to stand and call out in a loud voice to all the world to inform them that there is only one God for the entire world and that it

12. See also Lippman Bodoff, “Was Yehudah Halevi Racist”? *JUDAISM* 38:4 (Spring, 1989): 174-184, and Efraim Shmueli, *Seven Jewish Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 130-32.

is proper to serve Him alone. He would walk and discourse and gather people from one city to another and from one kingdom to another until he came to the Land of Canaan. He would teach each person in accordance with his intellectual capability until he had returned him to the true way, until thousands and tens of thousands joined him. They are the House of Abraham . . . He also instructed and taught Isaac. Isaac taught Jacob and appointed him to teach . . . Thus did this teaching continue and increase among the children of Jacob and among those drawn to them, until a people who knew God was formed. [Because of] the long sojourn in Egypt, they returned to their previous ways and began to worship stars like [the Egyptians]. All [became idolators] except the tribe of Levi . . . Because of God's love for us and his oath to Abraham our father, he appointed Moses our Rabbi as the teacher of all the prophets. (*Laws Regarding Idolatry* 1:1-3. See also his *Guide* 1:36, 3:29 and 3:37)

For Maimonides, the knowledge of God was not continuous from Adam to Abraham. A spiritual disruption had occurred among people, and the original monotheistic tradition had been lost.

In Maimonides's historiography, monotheism was *recovered* and disseminated by intellection rather than by intuition. Abraham "assembled the people and called them by way of teaching and instruction to adhere to the truth which he had grasped" (*Guide* 1:39). Maimonides de-emphasizes the significance of Abraham's pedigree, and focuses upon Abraham's instruction of Isaac. By requiring study as the way to God, he argues for the universality of monotheism, and illustrates the conditional and weak nature of faith. In Egypt, the Jewish people lost their focus on one God and became entangled in the cult and culture surrounding them. Although the prerequisite for redemption was God's love, the deliverance begins with the intellectual instruction by Moses of the Israelites. By emphasizing personal study and behavior, Maimonides points to the individual nature of one's relationship with God.

In contrast to these intellectual and inclusive emphases, Halevi argues that Abraham "acquired what he acquired from the divine *Amr* by love, not by speculation" (*Kuzari* 4:17). That is, the relationship with God was "built into" Abraham, not developed by him. Moreover, this spiritual lineage was to continue on an individual basis until it would be expanded to include all the children of Jacob, and all of their children. From then on, because of their common ancestry, even those who might sin were to be included in this precious group.

Equally significant for this discussion, Halevi imagines the Egyptian sojourn to have been one of *faithfulness*, while Maimonides sees that experience as similar to what had transpired after Adam — a decline in the divine-human bond as the result of *faithlessness*. Halevi writes:

When the children of Israel were enslaved in Egypt . . . none of them fled [the people] or escaped to another country. No alien entered among them. They waited for the time, which had been promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to inherit the Land of Canaan. (*Kuzari* 1:83; see also 1:95)

Despite the abject status of the Israelites in Egypt, they did not abandon

their people or their faith. Halevi's description of Israelite behavior in Egypt follows from his theory of the nature of covenant. For him, God's love was unconditional, being based on a criterion prior to any action.¹³ Although the people did not have to re-develop an awareness of God, Halevi did think that their actions needed perfection in order to attain redemption. One of the critical acts was a return to Zion, because "this holy place reminds people and stimulates them to love God (*Kuzari* 5:27).

In distinction, Maimonides indicated that the Jews who left Egypt needed to establish, or at least renew, the covenant with God. For him, correct belief and behavior are acquired with effort, and faith represents a fragile link to the divine:

Our ancestors who left Egypt had been primarily idolators there. They mingled with the nations and learned from their actions. [This was the case] until the Holy One, may He be praised, sent Moses our Rabbi, the teacher of all the prophets, and separated us from the peoples and brought us under the wings of the Presence. [This was] for us and for all the converts. Then he established for all of us one law. (*Responsa* #293, *Letter to Obadiah*)

Just as Maimonides earlier had drawn a clear parallel between the followers of Abraham and the convert, so here he compares the Jews who left Egypt to converts. For him, a Jew is not merely chosen by God, but always choosing God, always accepting the *mizvot*.

Maimonides and Halevi also offer alternative interpretations of a third critical episode of Biblical history, the incident of the Golden Calf. For Halevi, the sin of the Calf was not committed by the entire community of Israel. The "singular" people was not responsible for God's anger or the destruction of the Tablets of the Covenant. Only a few souls were actively involved in the rebellion and, even then, their sin could be excused if properly understood.

Their sin involved making an image, which was forbidden to them. Also, they connected the divine *Amr* to something created by their hands and will which was not commanded by God. Their excuse was the carelessness which had previously been extensive. But the ones who worshipped [the Calf] were [only] about three thousand from the six hundred thousand [Israelites] . . . The explanation of the leaders who assisted in making [the Calf] was that its [creation] had a [good] goal: to distinguish the rebels from the faithful, so that the rebels who worshipped the Calf would be killed. For this, they were also criticized, for they brought the rebellion from potentiality and internality to actuality.

That sin was not a departure from the accepted practice of serving the One who brought them out of Egypt. They merely disobeyed one of His commandments. For He, who is exalted, forbade images and they used an

13. Perhaps Halevi's interpretation of the Egyptian experience was also designed to send a message of succor to his fellow Jews, members of the "despised faith." Recall that the subtitle of the *Kuzari* is *The Book of Refutation and Proof in Defense of the Despised Faith*. His description of the sojourn in Egypt might be taken as a paradigmatic message to a later generation. On Halevi's covert style, see Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) (reprint).

image . . . Moreover, the intent of the people was not to rebel against the service of God. Rather, they tried to serve [God by the use of images] . . . Despite this [rationale], those who worshipped the Calf were punished . . . Their sum was [only] about three thousand out of a total of six hundred thousand [Israelites]. [For the others,] manna did not stop . . . the cloud to guard them and the pillar of fire to guide them [remained]. Prophecy continued and increased among them. Nothing which was special was taken away from them except the two tablets which Moses shattered. [Even] they were returned to them after Moses pleaded for their restoration. [Even] that sin was forgiven. (Kuzari, 1:97)

The episode of the Golden Calf was, according to Halevi, not idolatry. The people merely used a prohibited image for their worship of God. Not all images were forbidden — the two cherubim were allowed — but a specific authorization was required. Moreover, only one-half of one per cent of the community was involved in this rebellion. The Children of Israel never fell from grace; their special status was never in question.

Maimonides devotes much attention, in both the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Guide*, to the subject of idolatry. Much of his writing on the subject can be understood as an effort to purify the monotheistic ideal. Although he does not formally discuss the incident of the Golden Calf, one may discern his opinion from a careful reading of the *Guide*. There (1:36), Maimonides mentions that “the expressions ‘wrath,’ ‘anger,’ and ‘jealousy’ are exclusively used with reference to idolatry.” Although he did not specifically mention the episode of the Calf, Maimonides wrote, “Expressions of this kind are too numerous to be counted. However, if you trace them in all the books, you will find that it is as we have said.” In describing God’s “emotion,” the Torah used the term *haron af* (wrath) twice regarding the incident of the Calf (Exodus 32:11-12). For Maimonides, the incident constituted a clear act of idol worship, to be twice condemned. While Maimonides does not indicate that any covenant renewal transpired following the incident of the Golden Calf, the event served as another example of the fragile nature of faith and the Divine-Jewish connection.”¹⁴

14. Since Strauss’ *Persecution*, much has been written about the need for a close reading of Maimonides, in order to reveal his true opinions. Attention has been focused on the relationship between the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Guide*, seeking to differentiate between Maimonides *qua* halakhist and as philosopher. See Strauss, “How to Study the *Guide*,” Introduction to Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, tr. S. Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963). As Isadore Twersky notes, this question predates Strauss. See his “Some Non-Halakhic Aspects of the *Mishneh Torah*,” in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 97-98, and his *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 447-471.

As an example of the need to parse Maimonides carefully, compare his statement that Divine anger is to be understood only metaphorically (*Mishneh Torah*, Book of Knowledge, Basic Principles 1:12) with his observation regarding *people* that one may display anger, but only as a ruse to obtain a particular end (*Mishneh Torah*, Book of Knowledge, Laws of Moral Conduct 2:3). One might reasonably conclude that Biblical references to Divine anger are for didactic, not descriptive purposes.

III

As a review of these three Biblical incidents has shown, Maimonides consistently adheres to a position which sees the link between God and Israel as dependent upon the beliefs and behaviors of individuals. In contrast, Halevi has been shown to develop the perspective that the covenant is unconditional, and is limited to the nation of Israel. If the relationship with God is nationally based, as Halevi contends, one should expect prophecy, as the supreme example of a Divine-human connection, to be limited to members of the Israelite nation. Conversely, if the connection with God is not dependent on ethnicity, then prophecy would be a universal phenomenon.

In response to a question from the King of the Khazars, the Rabbi states, "Anyone from the nations [of the world] who accompanies us and converts, may the Lord be gracious to him as He is to us, is not brought to our level (*Kuzari* 1:27)." Similarly, he comments later:

Anyone who comes to convert, we let them know of the commandments which they shall have to fulfill. . . . If the convert is strong and accepts upon himself to go in this path, he and his descendants already merit in great measure closeness to God. But even after he accepts all this, he is not comparable to an Israelite from birth. For only an Israelite by birth is eligible to become a prophet. The goal and purpose of converts is to become pious and wise, not to be prophets. (*Kuzari* 1:115)

All Jews were to live by the divine *Amr* (here: word, or the commandments). Still, for Halevi, the divine *Amr* (here: a spark) was transmitted by heredity. This concept results in a metaphysical difference between Jews-by-birth and Jews-by-choice, and determines the possibility of prophecy, union with the Divine *Amr* (here: the will of God). It should be recalled that, for medieval philosophers, the prophet represented the apex of human achievement.¹⁵ The prophet was the fully realized person, the ideal to which all should aspire. By limiting prophecy to Jews, Halevi was also limiting the humanity of non-Jews. In addition to distinguishing between Jews and non-Jews, Halevi's "metaphysical racism" extends even to those who choose to become Jewish. A convert to Judaism could not be on the same level as someone descended from Abraham; Halevi leaves in doubt the status of the child of the convert.¹⁶

While consistently asserting the prophetic primacy of Moses, Maimo-

15. On the conception of the prophet in medieval philosophy, see Colette Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), s.v. "prophecy," and *Encyclopedia Judaica* vol. 13, pp. 1176-1179.

16. See Daniel J. Lasker, "Proselyte Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the Thought of Judah Halevi," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* (July-October 1990): 78, n.7; see also Bodoff, *Op. cit.*, who discusses Halevi's ambiguity (and concludes that convert progeny may be "born Jews") in the context of Halevi's alleged "metaphysical racism." On the general point of born Jews versus converts as prophets, Bodoff draws attention to an interesting parallel: the requirement of the United States Constitution that the President be native born, not a naturalized citizen.

nides denies that the prophetic capacity is transmitted through heredity. In his *Letter to Yemen*, he asserted:

The reason we disbelieve in the prophecy of Omar or Zayyid is not because they are non-Jews — as the masses think . . . For Job, Zophar, Bildad, Eliphaz, and Elihu are all considered prophets by us, although they are not Israelites. On the other hand, Hannaniah ben Azzur was a Jew, but was considered a false and cursed prophet. But we believe in a prophet because of what he says, not because of his descent . . .

For Maimonides, one's religious and human status is not dependent on biology, but on the truth of one's actions and beliefs.

From all of the above, it has been shown that Halevi's biological-national orientation to Judaism distinguishes between the human relationship with God of those in the community of the covenant, and others. Although Halevi does posit a messianic preparatory role for Christians and Moslems, they are still hierarchically of an inferior status to Jews.¹⁷ Even when allowing for conversion to Judaism, Halevi limits converts to a non-prophetic status.

Halevi is the first medieval thinker to attempt to differentiate Jew and Gentile on the basis of metaphysical criteria in addition to historical experience. Scholem and others have called attention to the "profound influence" that the *Kuzari* exerted upon the understanding of the significance of the *people* of Israel by the early kabbalists of Provence and Gersonides and by the author of the *Zohar*.¹⁸ The *Zohar* wedded the psychological teachings of Neoplatonism to the classical idea of the election of Israel to articulate an hierarchy of function and significance within the faculties of the human soul. Thus, the *nefesh*, or basic soul, is to be found within all human beings, and is the source of their vitality. The other two aspects of the soul, *ru'ah* and *neshamah*, are found only in the spiritually aroused individual. Non-Jews may possess *nefesh*, which embraces the vitality of the material aspect of existence, and derives from the "other side" (known as the *sitra ahra*, the realm of evil or the demonic), but only Jews have the more spiritually developed upper soul which is nourished by the "holy side" (*sitra kaddisha*).¹⁹ This duality is further stressed in the writing of the 18th century Lurianic kabbalist, Rabbi Hayyim Vital, who distinguishes between "Divine" and "natural" souls.²⁰ As a consequence, the Talmudic dictum, that a convert is like a newborn, took on more than metaphorical meaning. Conversion was seen as the acquisition by the proselyte of a new soul; "however, it was not of the same high spiritual calibre as the souls of those born as Jews."²¹ The Maharal of Prague, Rabbi Judah Loewe, was

17. See *Kuzari* 4:23 and Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, p. 62.

18. Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Quadrangle, 1974), pp. 44 and 154.

19. *Zohar*, Genesis 18b-19a; *Mishnat ha'Zohar*, Y. Tishbi, ed., vol 2, pp. 44-7; Scholem, *Op. cit.*, p. 167.

20. *Sha'arei Kedushah* as cited in Scholem, *Op. cit.*

21. Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance*, p. 147, citing *Zohar Be'shallah* 168a and *Mishpatim* 95b.

extremely reluctant to accept converts to Judaism, because of his conception of the difference between the souls of Jews and Gentiles.²² Hasidic thought, basing its outlook on the *Zohar*, also accepts this strong bifurcation. Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Lubavitch Hasidism, wrote that “the souls of the nations of the world emanate from the other, unclean *kelipot* (in kabbalah, referring to the material world, the vessels carrying the Divine sparks of holiness that were separated from God in the process of creation), which contain no good whatever.”²³

In contrast to this trend within Jewish theology, Maimonides' understanding of religion allows for both the specific nature of the covenant and the universal experience of God. His model is particularly open to conversion to Judaism, because he acknowledges that non-Jews may develop monotheistic awareness. In fact, Maimonides' description of the covenant renewal connected to the Exodus specifically points to the opportunity of conversion. Basing himself on the Talmud (B. *Yevamot* 46b), he indicates that the steps involved in the restoration of the covenant were circumcision, immersion, and the offering of a sacrifice. As a result, these rituals became the paradigm for the procedures required of all converts to Judaism (until the destruction of the Temple ended the sacrificial system).

Israel entered the covenant through three acts: circumcision, immersion and sacrifice. Circumcision took place in Egypt, as it is written: “And no stranger [uncircumcised] shall eat it [the Passover lamb].” Moses circumcized them all, for all of them, except for the tribe of Levi, had nullified the covenant of circumcision in Egypt . . . Immersion took place in the wilderness . . . as did sacrifice . . . This is [the model] for all generations; when a Gentile desires to enter the covenant and to find shelter in the Presence [he should do the same]. (*Mishneh Torah, Laws Regarding Forbidden Relations* 13:1-4)

Reflecting on the sacred history of the Jewish people, Maimonides suggests that, at critical points in Biblical history, people who followed God were “converted” to the covenant. Theologically, all the Jews of his day — and of our own era — would thus be descended from converts!

Given that orientation, Maimonides' correspondence with Obadiah the Proselyte regarding the status of the convert is quite comprehensible. Troubled by the first blessing of the *Amidah*, which praises “our God and the God our fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” Obadiah wrote to Maimonides. How could he, a convert whose ancestors were non-Jews, recite those words? Maimonides responded:

Abraham our father is the one who taught the people, instructed them and let them know the true path . . . He struck out against idolatry, overthrew [pagan] worship, and brought many under the wings of the Presence. He taught and instructed them and commanded his children and household

22. Ibid., p. 140, citing *Gevurot Hashem*, ch. 72. Also see Byron L. Sherwin, *Mystical Theology and Social Dissent* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1981), pp. 102-6. Both Katz and Sherwin point to other rabbis who completely prohibit conversion.

23. *Tanya: Likuttei Amarim*, ch.1, 6a.

after him to follow the path of the Lord . . . Therefore, all who convert — until the end of generations — and all who profess montheistic belief in the Holy One, may He be praised, are considered pupils of Abraham our father and they are all part of his household. For it is he who returned them to goodness, just as he caused those of his generations [to turn to God] by his mouth and lesson . . . Thus, Abraham our father is the father of those of his seed who correctly walk in his way and the father to his pupils and all who convert . . . There is no difference at all between us and them. (*Letter to Obadiah, Responsum* 293; my emphases, to highlight Maimonides' intellectual and didactic conception of Abraham's activities.)

Maimonides was aware that there are many *legal* distinctions between one who was born a Jew and one who voluntarily chose Judaism, yet he chose to emphasize that there is no *theological* difference because of origin. Both groups of Jews are constantly in the situation of having to affirm intellectually their commitment to one God.

As Hartman and Twersky have contended, Maimonides sought to integrate his theological and legal decisions.²⁴ This may be seen not only in regard to Obadiah, but also in reference to his fairly simple guidelines for the acceptance of converts (see *Mishneh Torah*, Book of Holiness: Laws of Forbidden Intercourse 14:1-5). In addition, in his codification of a law related to *bikkurim*, the ceremony of first fruits, Maimonides addresses the same issue which Obadiah would later ask of him. For this ritual, the Torah prescribes that the individual who brings the basket of first fruits to the priest should state his faith in God who fulfills His covenant, and recount the sacred history of ancient Israel: "My father was a wandering Aramean who went down to Egypt to sojourn there while [his family were] few in number . . . We cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors . . . The Lord took us out of Egypt . . . And now behold: I bring the first fruit of this land which you gave me, Lord (Deut. 26:3-10)." May such a statement be made by someone whose ancestors were not enslaved and whose ancestors did not enter the land? From Maimonides' ruling in his legal code, the *Mishneh Torah*, we can see how his legal and theological creativity were intertwined.

In *Mishnah Bikkurim* (1:4), the issue of whether a convert may recite this confession of faith is raised, but ultimately rejected. The convert is included with others who have the obligation to fulfill the commandment of bringing the first fruits, since the Torah instructs, "You shall rejoice in all the good which the Lord gave you . . . you, the Levite, and the stranger among you" (Deut. 26:11) But the convert was not authorized to say the classical formula, since the convert was not among the people whose ancestors entered the land.

However, an alternative tradition was preserved in the *Talmud Yerushalmi*:

24. The integration of philosophy and halakhah in Maimonides is explicated by Hartman, *Maimonides*, and by Twersky, "Introduction," *Op. cit.*, both of whom demonstrate the theological sensitivity which infuses Maimonides' understanding of Jewish law.

It was taught in the name of Rabbi Judah: "A convert brings [*bikkurim* — the first fruits] and recites [the historic affirmation]." What is the reason? [Scripture taught:] "I intend you to be the ancestor of multitudes" (Gen. 17:4). In the past you were the "ancestor of Aram" [*av aram*.] Now you shall be the "ancestor of multitudes" [*av hamon am*]. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said: "The law is according to Rabbi Judah."

While the *Yerushalmi* generally is not the normative source for Jewish law, Maimonides occasionally drew upon it to codify law.²⁵ Thus, he wrote:

The convert brings [*bikkurim* — the first fruits] and recites [the historical affirmation], for it was said to Abraham: "I intend you to be the ancestor to multitudes of nations." Thus [Abraham] is the ancestor of anyone who enters under the wings of the Presence. (*Mishneh Torah: Laws of First Fruits* 4:3)

One of the features of *Mishneh Torah* is the lack of sources for decisions by Maimonides. Here, too, he gives no reasons for his reliance on the *Yerushalmi* for this ruling. It may be seen as part of a larger pattern and attitude toward conversion and Judaism in his work. Being a Jew is not a matter of biology, but a matter of normative belief and behavior. Refusing to succumb to what he views as a genetic fallacy, Maimonides asserts that love of, and devotion to, God are not limited to Jews by birth, or even to Jews:

Any person, among all creatures, whose spirit moves him and who understands [correct beliefs], on his own [in order] to separate [himself from false beliefs], who stand before God to serve and worship Him, and to act correctly as God intended, is considered to have become sacred, holy of holies. God is his portion and inheritance forever. He merits in this world [communal care for] what he needs, just as the priests and the levites [are cared for by the community]. *Mishneh Torah: Laws of the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years* 13:13)

Despite Maimonides' openness to those who choose God, he is critical of those who have forsaken the traditional path of Abraham. He declares that Abraham is the ancestor of those "who *correctly* walk in his way" and who "act *correctly* as God intended" (*Responsum* #293, *Letter to Obadiah*, my emphasis). This would seem to exclude those Jews who do not follow the tradition.²⁶ Indeed, Maimonides was quite severe with those Jews who did not believe or behave in accordance with his conception of Judaism, going so far as to forbid redeeming a captive who intentionally transgressed the commandments (*Mishneh Torah: Book of Seeds, Laws of Gifts to the Poor* 8:14; see also *Laws of Repentance* 3:12). Unlike Halevi's assertion that even those who sin remain within the covenant, Maimonides indicated that the relationship with God is conditional on the individual and the community maintaining certain standards.

In fairness, it should be noted that Maimonides tempers his theolog-

25. See generally, S. Cohen, "Can Converts to Judaism Say 'God of our Fathers'?" in *JUDAISM*, vol. 40, no. 4 (Fall 1991): 419-28. On Maimonides' use of the Talmud *Yerushalmi*, see Twersky, "Introduction," *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

26. I am indebted to Dr. Aviezer Ravitzky of the Hebrew University for this insight.

ical perspective in order to preserve the unity of the Jewish people. In his *Guide for the Perplexed* (3:49), he indicates that circumcision is a sign of those who believe in the unity of God: "Thus everyone who is circumcized joins Abraham's covenant." Here, there is no indication of conditionality. Indeed, the act of circumcision is considered as behavioral evidence of fidelity to the covenant. Still, Halevi's understanding of the covenant as a genetic bond allowed him to be more accepting and tolerant of all Jews, sinners or righteous.

IV

In current times, Jews are again involved in a complex debate about the nature of the ancient covenant with God. With the renewal of Jewish political sovereignty in the State of Israel, the attitude of Judaism regarding chosenness and the status of non-Jews becomes extremely important, because theoretical arguments may become practical programs.

Halevi's love for the Jewish people was echoed in the 20th century by the sainted Rabbi Isaac Hakohen Kook, in order to foster support for the secular Jews involved in the Zionist effort to resettle the land of Israel.²⁷ As noted above, the ethnic distinctiveness of Jews may also have a harsher side toward non-Jews. Thus, in contemporary Israeli theological- political discourse, the fundamentalist leadership of Gush Emunim, followers of the disciples of Rabbi Kook, emphasize the exclusivistic theology of Halevi as justification for their nationalism.²⁸

Maimonides demonstrably saw intellectual attainment as a universalizing influence in the Middle Ages. He sought to de-emphasize messianic speculation and supernatural expectations. Now, with some noteworthy exceptions, this orientation has few adherents within the religious community of Israel.²⁹ Instead, messianic discourse abounds, and some restrictive legal rulings by Maimonides regarding non-Jews are used by some religious nationalists in Israel to justify their anti-Arab positions.³⁰

27. See selections in Arthur Hertzberg, ed., *The Zionist Idea* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1954), pp. 422, 425-6, 429, and Abraham Isaac Kook, *The Lights of Penitence, The Moral Principles, Lights of Holiness, Essays, Letters and Poems*, tr. and ed., Ben Zion Bokser (NY: Paulist Press, 1978), pp. 127, 224, 256-8, 271-81, where Rabbi Kook speaks of the chaotic and rebellious as vehicles (or "vessels" in kabbalistic terms) for the sacred. Also note Jacob Agus, "Preface," pp. xii and xiii, in Bokser's edition.

28. See Ian Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1988), pp. 29-34, and Stephen Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism, and Magic* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), pp. 228-37, for the impact of Rabbi Kook's thought on contemporary politics.

29. Distinctive voices for toleration include Rabbi Nahum Rabinowitz, Prof. Yeshayahu Leibowitz, and Rabbi David Hartman. See Hartman, *Conflicting Visions* (New York: Schocken, 1991).

30. *Mishneh Torah*, Book of Judges: Laws of Kings 5:4, 6:1-4 and 8:9-11, limits the rights of non-Jews in the Land of Israel, and details the obligation to destroy the seven nations who were inhabitants of the Land of Israel during the period of the Biblical conquest.

The reluctance of Judaism, after the Christianization of the Roman Empire, to seek converts reflects an historical reality which made proselytism undesirable. It also responds to a deep-seated theological and national need to differentiate between Jew and non-Jew. Part of the power and pathos of religion is the defining of a community — an “us” in distinction to a “them” — the identification, classification and valuation of persons within “our” group, and the development of social policies for “us” and “the Other.”³¹ How a community defines “the Other” has definite consequences for its self-image. Conversion, as a liminal experience, tends to blur the distinction, and thus becomes a dangerous border line and the focus of controversy. Still, in order to preserve the unity of the Jewish people, Maimonides’ ruling about the convert being identical to the born Jew was accepted as normative law for generations of traditional Jews.

But, in the current climate, the attitude of Halevi, as developed by the teachings of Kabbalah and Hasidism, is as likely to influence private opinion and public policy as the halakhic decision of Maimonides. According to this perspective, which underlies the desire to amend the Law of Return, the singularity and purity of the Jewish people must be preserved in anticipation of messianic redemption, since chosenness and covenant are biological realities in addition to being theological constructs.

In contrast, those who are more accepting of conversion may be motivated by more than a defensive reaction to the rate of intermarriage. They recognize the spiritual capacity and the receptivity of all people for God. While affirming an ethnic and particularistic component to Jewish life, this approach lays equal stress on an ideational and behavioral basis for covenantal chosenness. In this regard, they remain followers of Maimonides, who preserved the universal thrust within monotheism, emphasized the continual need to reconfirm faith by deed, and asserted the obligation of individual Jews to serve God with a whole heart.

Based on these and other rulings, a number of Israeli rabbis have identified Arab residents as these seven nations, and contended that these people have minimal rights in a Jewish state. However, Maimonides’ innovation was his understanding that an Israelite nation must offer peace even to the seven nations, and that if they accept the Noahide commandments they are to live as resident aliens with specific rights. Maimonides develops a hierarchy — Jews, those who have accepted the Noahide commandments, and pagans — which is comparable to the Islamic hierarchy of Moslems, *Dhimmis* (adherents of Scripture) and all others. The *Me’iri* (Rabbi Menahem Meir of Perpignan, 1249-1306) similarly differentiated between pagans and those that are “guided by the ways of religion and serve God in any way” (B. *Baba Kamma* 113b, *ad loc.*). Indicating that Christian and Moslem Arabs do follow the Noahide laws, and that the seven nations no longer exist as distinct peoples, Rabbi Isaac Halevy Herzog, the second Chief Rabbi of the Land of Israel, argued against any sort of discrimination against Arab inhabitants. See *Tehumin* B (1981), cited by Aviezer Ravitzky, “Roots of Kahanism,” *The Jerusalem Quarterly* 39 (1986). Also see “Our Rigid Religionists,” *Jerusalem Post*, 30 January 1986, and Ian Lustick, *Op cit.*

31. See Jacob Neusner, “Talking Peace, Making War: The Paradoxical Record of Religion,” *The Jewish Spectator* (Winter, 1990): 24-6.

The Religious Dimension of Yiddish Secularism

GERSHON WINER

THE TERM "SECULARISM" IS GENERALLY APPLIED in two different though not unrelated contexts. One, is the political-sociological domain, in that "the physical wellbeing of mankind should predominate over religious considerations in civil life,"¹ resulting in the separation of Church and State. The other, is a philosophical concept asserting the "self-sufficiency of man's natural powers to direct his own destiny,"² and is an all-inclusive way of life rejecting the authority of religion and the existence of the divinity.

Yiddish secularism presents a unique phenomenon, combining a secularist *weltanschauung* with a religious mood. The equivalent Yiddish term, *veltlichkeit*, became current nearly a century ago, and began as outright opposition to all religious beliefs, practices and institutions, ultimately evolving into an ideology which sought to bridge the gap between secularism and religion. It found expression in philosophical essays, in educational theory, and in Yiddish *belles lettres*. Beginning as militant secularism in the United States in the 1890s, its proponents delighted in flaunting their violation of religious practices, as in the case of the "Yom Kippur Ball," marriage without religious ceremony or sanction, and vehement denial of the existence of God. The fact that the origins of this behavior were in America rather than in Eastern Europe, although its exponents were Russian Jewish immigrants, is to be attributed to the absence in the new land of the watchful eye of officialdom over the ideas and private acts of the citizenry — a condition alien to the Russian scene.

One of the first prophets of militant atheism was Benjamin Feigenbaum, who was its advocate in the Yiddish press during the nineties, particularly in the *Zukunft* (founded in 1892) and in the Yiddish daily *Forward*, starting in 1897. Although it ran its course within a few years, and the extremist form of anti-religious behavior soon became obsolete, it did not entirely disappear, and its remnants were still visible in the Yiddish socialist school system in the 1930s.

1. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), p. 1173.

2. John S. Barbachar, *Modern Philosophies of Education* (N.Y.: McGraw-Hill, 1969), p. 189.

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By the end of the nineteenth century, with the inroads of modernism in Jewish life, there opened up three routes of release from the suffocating restrictions of traditional religion, that did not demand total severance of ties from Judaism: cultural assimilation, Hebrew nationalism, and Yiddish socialism. The first, advanced by the Reform movement, offered the option of identification with the majority, while retaining residual ties with the Jewish religion. Its followers became "Germans (or Russians or Poles) of the Mosaic faith." The second, led to Palestine, later Israel, and followed an independent course of secularization parallel to similar processes among other nationalities. The third, with Yiddish as its vehicle of expression, evolved without a territorial base or political framework, and developed an all-inclusive culture embracing literature, the arts and educational institutions.

The major thrust of the Yiddish secular movement was the establishment of Yiddish supplementary schools in the United States, and all-day schools in Eastern Europe, Canada, Mexico, South America, and Australia. It was ideologically associated with various theories of socialism which shared a common secularist platform, calling for the destruction of the old order, liberation from all forms of oppression, and the espousal of universalism. Yiddish was the language of the common people, and could, therefore, be mobilized against the clerical, the theological and the capitalistic. The language itself was initially cultivated solely as a means of communication with the masses, rather than for any inherent values of its own. Eventually, Yiddish and what it stood for was pursued for its own sake, a process which culminated in the desecularization of Yiddish secularism. How that transformation came about is the burden of this study.

Following the heyday of militant atheism during the first decade of the twentieth century, with its exhibitionist flaunting of anti-religion, the Yiddish school became the fertile soil in which secularism was nurtured. Jacob Levin (1884-1958), one of the first Yiddish educators committed to secularism, devoted his life to this cause. He produced pedagogical material, founded schools, served as a teacher, and organized summer camps — for the trinity of Yiddish, socialism, and secularism. A Yiddish teacher prior to World War I, and one of the founders of the Yiddish secular school in Warsaw, he was among the pioneers of the Workmen's Circle afternoon Yiddish schools in 1918 in the United States. For a short period during the 1920s, he became involved with the Yiddish communist schools. Inspired by his atheist faith, he removed Jewish holidays, traditions and practices from the school curricula, supplanting them with new, so-called "progressive and creative" content. He produced detailed plans for the secular observance of Jewish holidays, Bar-Mizvah ceremonies, and funeral services, actually attempting the codification of a modern *Shulhan Arukh*. He also invented new holidays, such as the holiday of the Yiddish book and the festival of the

Yiddish writer. He elevated Yiddish literature to the category of holy scripture.

The founder and leading theoretician of Yiddish secularism was Dr. Chaim Zhitlowsky (1865-1943). Following the route taken by many “emancipated” intellectuals in Russia in the 1880s, abandoning traditional patterns for revolutionary activism and ideological cosmopolitanism, Dr. Zhitlowsky was drawn to the emerging Jewish nationalism. But the restoration of the Jewish people in Palestine and the revival of Hebrew culture seemed relatively unrealistic to him. In 1892 he published a brochure in Russian, *A Jew to Jews*,³ in which he formulated the principles of Jewish socialism, rejected assimilation, and advocated the rights of Jews as a national cultural entity, “leading Jewish radicals from cosmopolitan and self-negation to modern Jewishness.”⁴ His theory of Jewish survival excluded religion as the binding force of Jewish identity. Instead, the unifying factor in Jewry — when three quarters of the world Jewish population consisted of Eastern-European based Jewry — was to be Yiddish language and culture.⁵ However, he did not rule out religion altogether from Jewish life. It was merely to be transferred from the public to the private domain, a matter of individual freedom of choice and conscience, but it had no place in the educational system, for it represented authoritarianism based on divine revelation. “No Jew can demand from another Jew that he subscribe to any particular dogma as a condition for being a Jew.”⁶ Every individual, therefore, irrespective of his religious faith, could be part of the Jewish community. Indeed, Zhitlowsky could conceive of Jews remaining members of the Jewish people even after converting to Christianity, as long as Yiddish continued to be their language and culture!⁷

He was not insensitive to religion and its values. He insisted that the concept of secularism is not tied to anti-religiosity. “Atheistic materialism, an integral part of secularism, represents only one tendency within it.”⁸

Indeed, many years prior to this declaration, Zhitlowsky had written a rather extensive essay entitled “The National Poetic Rebirth of the Jewish Religion” (1909),⁹ affirming the ethical and philosophical worth of most Jewish holidays, Sabbath rest, and other components of Jewish life and practice. These he recommended for the secular Jew as providing a national, unifying bond — essential to a minority threatened

3. Chaim Zhitlowsky, *Yid un Velt* (N.Y.: Yikuf, 1945), pp. 9-44, [Yiddish], translated by the author in 1913.

4. Saul Gutman, *Traditsye un Banayung* (N.Y.: Matones, 1967), p. 153 [Yiddish].

5. Chaim Zhitlowsky, *Gezamelte Shriften* (Warsaw: Beshoza, 1929), vol. 4, p. 181 [Yiddish].

6. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

7. Zhitlowsky, *Yid un Velt*, p. 290.

8. *Oifn Shaidveg*, anthology (Paris, 1939) [Yiddish].

9. Chaim Zhitlowsky, *Geklibene Verk* (N.Y.: Cyco, 1955), pp. 219-256. [Yiddish].

by assimilationist forces. It took many decades for such an unconventional approach to have its effect in Yiddish secular circles. Zhitlowsky was thus able to sanction, harmoniously, disparate — and sometimes what seemed to others inconceivable — possibilities, in keeping with his cherished principle of freedom of thought and behavior, within a Jewish community united by Yiddish language and culture.

Zhitlowsky, as writer and orator, supplied the major intellectual impact on the broad spectrum of Yiddish secular movements, from the Yiddish Socialist Bund and various labor-Zionist factions, to the centrist parties sharing the common platform of Yiddish language and culture. He attracted numerous followers in Europe and subsequently in America, although the last seven years of his life were clouded by his association with pro-Soviet elements, which shocked and alienated his life-long disciples.

He was able to make peace with the repressive policies of communist totalitarianism as long as it formally subscribed to Jewish national rights by supporting the Yiddish language and by providing for a Jewish autonomous territory in the Far East (Biro-Bidjan). He fell prey to the rhetoric of communist propaganda, particularly in its adoption of “progressivism” in its political vocabulary — a term he regarded as sacred.

A second source of pivotal influence in the emergence of Yiddish secularism was the historian, Simon Dubnow, author of the monumental ten-volume *World History of the Jewish People*. Following the historical evolutionary approach, he perceived of the Jewish people as having reached a state of development beyond the political-territorial which characterizes other nations. Though dispersed throughout the world, the Jewish people will succeed in maintaining its identity, he argued, as a cultural-spiritual entity unified by historical consciousness, nourished by the progressive humanitarian foundations of its history and culture. True, this culture had originally found primary expression in its religious tradition, but the sense of peoplehood and the moral values of the Jewish spirit and experience had also been conveyed through non-religious cultural channels. One may therefore subscribe to a secular *weltanschauung* and a way of life, and still remain rooted in the fullness of the Jewish heritage. Unlike Zhitlowsky, Dubnow did not insist on Yiddish as the only instrument for Jewish identification, although he did recognize its importance and encouraged its development. As a historian, he also could not fail to be cognizant of the role of Hebrew in Jewish life. Furthermore, in advocating a program of Jewish survival secured by legally guaranteed autonomous cultural rights for organized Jewish communities within the existing political territorial entities of Europe, he did not rule out the language of the land in the totality of national creativity. He composed his works on history in Russian, and his other major writings in Hebrew.

Dubnow's theory of cultural nationalism¹⁰ and its emphasis on communal autonomy gained considerable support among the intelligentsia committed to Yiddish. After World War I, it was officially adopted as the political platform of the "Folks Party" in Poland. Dubnow's influence extended to Mordecai Kaplan in America, who recognized the contribution of Dubnow to his own philosophy of Reconstructionism, and its theory of Judaism as a civilization and not just a religion. Dubnow, in contrast to Zhitlowsky, could not conceive of an individual remaining within the Jewish group after converting to Christianity.

Yiddish secularism channelled its intellectual and organizational energy towards the education of the young. In the absence of government restrictions, and spurred by the arrival of the leading spokesmen of secularist thought from Eastern Europe, the American scene became fertile soil for the growth of Yiddish supplementary secular schools. The Yiddish schools in America, therefore, preceded those that emerged in Russia. The beginnings were in 1910 in New York and Montreal, under the name of "National Radical Schools," purporting to offer a "modern" Jewish education, with the emphasis on Yiddish language and literature. The initiative came from various political groupings in the non-religious community. By the early 1920s, there were four separate Yiddish school systems, with varying degrees of secular commitment: the non-partisan Sholem Aleichem Institute; the Labor-Zionist; the Workmen's Circle (socialist); and the International Workers Order (communist). There were also a few schools identified as "Borochov," sponsored by the Marxist faction of the Socialist Zionist movement known as Left Poalei Zion.

The "Statement of Principles" of the Sholem Aleichem Folk Institute is representative of the premises and goals common to all of these schools. Adopted at a conference in 1927, it reflects the thinking crystallized by the founders and leaders of Yiddish education over a period of nearly two decades. "The new Jewish school has become necessary and possible thanks to the Jewish secular milieu that has evolved in recent decades" This is defined as a "view of the world (which) coincides with the results of scientific research." The most significant statement of the "Principles" is the claim that "it doesn't look upon religion as the basis of our spiritual life Jewish religious beliefs and customs must be considered from the cultural-historic standpoint."¹¹ By 1953, significant changes had taken place in the secular perspective. The revised educational platform, issued that year, calls for "a deep interest in the future of Israel," indicative of the re-orientation of the non-Zionist sector brought about by the establishment

10. Shimon Dubnow, *Mikhtavim al Hayahadut, Hayeshanah V'hahadashah* [Hebrew], translated by A. Levinson (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1937).

11. Saul Goodman, ed., *Our First Fifty Years* (N.Y.: Sholem Aleichem Folk Institute, 1972), p. 135.

of the Jewish state. "Jewish tradition" is introduced for the first time into the curriculum. Terms such as "cultural heritage" and "spiritual" now replace the previously hallowed label of "secular" which had appeared nine times in the earlier "Principles."

This is no indication that secularism had been abandoned. It was only reinterpreted and redefined to include "elements in Jewish tradition" to foster "a feeling of kinship with Jews throughout the world." There was recognition of the importance of "active participation in Jewish life ... (and the) ways of life of past generations in Europe ... (and) an appreciation of their cultural heritage (in order) to be intimately linked with our historical experience." The new program unequivocally aimed "to preserve and perpetuate those elements of the Jewish tradition which are in harmony with Jewish life in America," and was designed to transmit "an awareness of the universal aspect of Jewishness."¹²

The three prime movers in the new orientation toward Jewish tradition as an integral element of secular education were the educator-psychologist Leibush Lehrer, author-essayist Shlomo Simon, and the educator Abraham Golomb. The first two were identified with the Sholem Aleichem schools in New York, while the latter was associated with educational institutions at all levels in Vilna, Canada, and Mexico. They sought the gradual introduction of Jewish holidays into the school curriculum, along with the traditional rituals of *Oneg Shabbat*, the Passover Seder, and, eventually, the Bar Mizvah ceremony. There was also partial compliance with religious dietary restrictions. Alongside the schools, summer camps for children were launched, serving as laboratories for experimental innovations in the observance of Jewish tradition. Satellite "colonies" for adults sprang up adjacent to these camps, and became centers of cultural ferment, giving rise to the new secularism.

The initial period of militant atheism waned as it became evident that negation alone would not be sufficient to fill the vacuum created by the conscious exclusion of traditional Jewish beliefs, ceremonials and institutions. Furthermore, the very vocabulary of the Yiddish language and the content and pervading spirit of Yiddish texts, from cradle songs to folkloristic and literary sources, abound in religious symbols and aspirations, and reflect a life permeated by faith. This makes modern Yiddish literature quite different from its Hebrew counterpart. Hebrew authors in Palestine, and later in Israel, in a milieu of an evolving modern way of life deliberately divested of religious elements, could readily ignore and — in keeping with the ideology of the Zionist revolution — reject outright the East European heritage. Instead, they sought their spiritual sources in Biblical times, and created a new ritual, associated with the cultivation of the land, the seasons of the year, and the heroic

12. Ibid., p. 138.

narratives of ancient times. The tales of the Bible are replete with aesthetic and physical norms far removed from the religious outlook of East European Judaism. Likewise, the ethical sensitivity of the prophets could be incorporated into the new Israeli culture without theological and religious underpinning. Not so in the American setting, where Jewishness at best serves as a second, if not a secondary culture, and its medium (Yiddish) is inescapably steeped in the East European Jewish civilization, which is rooted in the religious experience. Thus, the Yiddish medium inevitably embraced a religious message.

With this insight, a new Yiddish secularism arose — at first subliminally and afterwards with full awareness. Hesitating at the start, and then with an overt and determined effort, it pursued its course, reinforced by three contributing factors. The first, was the American climate of opinion in which religion, even if diluted, is assertively pursued, making religious identification the only acceptable form of separatism and diversity within the framework of national unity. The second factor affecting the move to tradition was expediency — to respond to the needs of parents unprepared to remove their children from the mainstream of the Jewish community, where the religious celebration of Bar Mitzvah is a social necessity, for parents and children alike. A third motive was the concept of continuity as a rallying force in Jewish identification. A people living on its own historic soil, relatively free to forge its own culture, may entertain the notion of breaking with the past, without jeopardy to its survival. Immigrants in an alien physical and cultural environment cannot afford the luxury of revolutionary change without becoming vulnerable to attrition and the severance of ties with past generations, and with the people as a whole. To avoid this rift requires an emphasis on continuity from the traditional to the modern without sacrificing intellectual integrity.

The aforementioned three educator-theoreticians sought to provide a synthesis of religious tradition and secularist philosophy. In the early 1930s, Lehrer called for revision of the Yiddish secularist outlook, pointing to the need for “Judaizing its secularism just as it desires to secularize its Jewishness;” to accomplish this, there must be “a burning desire to reject less and modify more (and) wherever possible to reinforce an awareness of the continuity of the Jewish people . . .”¹³ In the decade that followed, these sentiments were further strengthened as a result of disillusionment with the promise of progress and modernism in improving the lot of Jewry in the Western world. The continuing hostility to Jews gave rise to greater cohesiveness among Jewish groups separated by deep ideological cleavages. “There emerges in Jewish life an inclination for tradition and traditionalism . . . a desire to seek spiritual strength in Jewish history and in the bond of fate with

13. Leibush Lehrer, *Zukunft*, N.Y., April 1935.

past generations . . . There are tendencies toward 'repentance' and turning to religion . . . The concept 'secularism' assumes a new definition."¹⁴

Lehrer built his philosophical structure on an analysis of the nature of Judaism, and concluded that the distinction between "religious" and "secular" is inapplicable in the context of Jewishness. Since Judaism is essentially behavior-and-experience oriented, rather than based on dogma and belief, there is no need for secularization in order for it to be acceptable to the modern scientific mind. In fulfilling a sociological function, normative Judaism becomes an all-encompassing way of life — folkways and life-style — not indivisibly linked to theological foundations. The Yiddish term is *shtaiger*, which embraces custom, life-style, sensitivity, attitudes, and values — a pattern of thought, feeling and behavior — with Yiddish as the vehicle of its expression and communication. There is, therefore, no dichotomy between the religious and the secular in Jewish life.

This thesis allows for the agnostic to join as "the tenth man" in synagogue prayer, and for non-believers to share the sanctity of the Sabbath and accept standards of *kashrut* observance. It transfers Judaism from the rational to the emotional, from the dogmatic to the empirical, from theology to history and sociology, from the divinely authoritative to the humanly sanctioned. This ultimately enabled the secular Sholem Aleichem schools to teach "certain prayers . . . and the decision did not lead to any heated debates regarding this alleged concession to religion."¹⁵ Lehrer's conception of Judaism attributes a unique mentality to the observant Jew. The regimen of ritual, observed so strictly, represented "not only the power of captivating faith, but also the compelling moral quality of loyalty, of identification with the Jewish community . . ."¹⁶ Divine commandment is converted into social conformity and cohesiveness. The result is secularization of religion, without compromising secularist theory or detracting from the significance of religious performance.

Lehrer sensed that, in the contemporary Jewish scene, "Jewish secularism . . . is found today largely among many Jews in the synagogues. This is not secularism nourished by negation of religion but by a positive attitude to folk values protected by Jewish traditional performance."¹⁷ To these folk values that make up tradition, "in modern times there was added — the consciousness of one's own language."¹⁸ Nonetheless, "ceremonials and rituals are primarily an expression of being attached to a certain way of living, of feeling at home with people who respond in a similar manner in instances of historic and emotional stimuli dom

14. Hyman B. Bass, *Undzer Dor Muz Antsheyn* (Tel Aviv: Peretz, 1963), p. 193 [Yiddish].

15. Goodman, *Our First Fifty Years*, p. 99.

16. Leibush Lehrer, *In Geist fun Traditsye* (Tel Aviv: Peretz, 1966), p. 24 [Yiddish].

17. *Ibid.*, p. 33

18. *Ibid.*, p. 61

inating their social setting.”¹⁹ This is quite different from the faith component of religion, as generally understood.

Lehrer did not ignore the God-idea entirely in his godless religion. He is prepared to deal with the “concept of God”, not “belief in God,” as pointed out by the Yiddish-Hebrew poet Aaron Zeitlin. “Without the God-idea there is a burden in my mind and great sadness in my heart.”²⁰ His reticence and inability to cope with the God-idea may be partially explained by his statement: “traditionalism is not part of the controversy between religion and secularism . . . (therefore) the traditionalist does not have to take a stand in metaphysical debates.”²¹ Judaism, to Lehrer, “is not a religion” in the metaphysical sense, though “it contains a core religious element, but in its totality it is not a purely religious system.”²² Proof of this is the interesting phenomenon that “the term religion has not really taken hold in either of our two languages (Hebrew and Yiddish) . . . while the authentic designation ‘Yiddishkeit’ has found more favor in the eyes of the classic generations.”²³

In stressing religious functional importance and psychological validity, Lehrer was not unaffected by the pragmatism and psychologism of William James, attributing truth and value to subjective human experience rather than to objective reality. Lehrer’s *shtetler* secularism may not be far removed from Modecai Kaplan’s Reconstructionism in many of its inferences, though the one is focused on the American scene and the other draws its inspiration from East European experience. One emphasizes living in, and harmonizing between, two civilizations, while the other is concerned primarily with preserving the Jewish ethnic heritage and solidarity.

The focus of attention in the preceding analysis of the Yiddish secular school was the Sholem Aleichem Folk Institute and its ideologist, Lehrer. The changes wrought through the decades, in charging “secularism” with traditional content and religious symbols and values, were characteristic of the entire Yiddish school movement. They included “the teaching of the Pentateuch, Hebrew, Jewish holidays in a more traditional format, and the weekly *Oneg Shabbat* . . . Not anti-religion but anti-dogma is the meaning of secularism.”²⁴

Shlome Simon (1895-1970), long-term president of the Sholem Aleichem Folk Institute, outdistanced Lehrer in the return to Jewish tradition. A dentist by profession, and an author, ideologue, scholar, and prolific writer by calling, he was most articulate and forthright in

19. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

20. Leibush Lehrer, *Azoi Zeinen Yiden* (N.Y.: Matones, 1959), p. 397 [Yiddish].

21. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 319.

23. Lehrer, *In Geist fun Traditsye*, p. 76.

24. Saul Gutman, in *Dertsingung Entsiklopedie* (N.Y.: Congress for Jewish Culture, 1959), p. 459 [Yiddish].

redirecting *veltlichkeit*, the Yiddish version of secularism, in the direction of a return to historical Judaism. Throughout his life he identified himself as belonging to the sector of "we, the secularists,"²⁵ even after having taken the tortuous route from negation to affirmation of religious beliefs and practices. In the course of over half a century of involvement in the Yiddish movement — active in two of its major channels of expression: education and literature — he became aware of its deficiencies. He viewed secular Jewishness as "an abstraction with no commitment,"²⁶ and the Yiddish schools as functioning in a vacuum without fulfilling the purpose of education, namely, preparation for meaningful participation in the life of society. The banner of rebellion raised by secularism in its initial stages, necessary at the time to foster rejection of the rigor and confinement of the old pattern, neither had, nor pretended to have, any relevance to any existing or contemplated life situation of the Jew. Not only was there no social context for the secularist school to be integrated with, but equally and poignantly missing were philosophical and intellectual premises out of which any new way of life could possibly evolve. True, there was Yiddish language and literature, which for the faithful became "a substitute for religion."²⁷ However, the emotional devotion to language and its survival, the romantic attachment to its folklore, the adulation accorded its authors and their major writings, the elevation of the Yiddish stage and platform to the level of a pulpit — all noteworthy in themselves — could not, in the final count, make up an all-encompassing pattern of life. "Literature within a frame of Jewish life can play an important role . . . Without Jewish life itself, it is no more than a decorative appendage."²⁸

Is the conclusion, then, to reject the secular outright and reassert the religious in full?

Not at all, we cannot, we need not return to the religion of by-gone generations . . . We are secular Jews . . . but note that the word "secular" is added on to the word "Jew." We do not renounce institutional Judaism, we do not ignore the Jewish way of life . . . We do not reject halachah . . . but for us it must take on an altogether new form.²⁹

Times have changed and so have needs.

We secular Jews tend to forget that we fought for secularism when Jewish life was exclusively religious and we were in need of secularism. We overlook the fact that we now have more than enough of secularism and what we need is Jewishness . . . content and life-style.³⁰

25. Shlome Simon, "*Di Marokhe Fun Yiddishen Sekularizm*," *Emuna Fun A Dor* (N.Y.: Matones, 1970), p. 124.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

27. Shlome Simon, *Oif Eigene Drochim* (Buenos Aires: Yidbuch, 1962), p. 218.

28. Simon, *Emuna Fun A Dor*, pp. 127-8.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

As Simon viewed it, this new, Yiddish secularism was not designed to seek accommodation with the modern world, but flowed from the need of those who were already “modern and wordly” to seek fulfillment within the context of Jewishness.

We do not return to Judaism for reasons of conformity . . . We do not want to make it easier for ourselves by measures of reform. On the contrary, we take upon ourselves a burden. We seek to fill our lives with Jewish sanctity and content . . . to make Judaism a part of our daily life.³¹

As a participant in, and observer of, the Yiddish secular school, Simon noted the gap between its chosen role and its level of performance, stemming not from lack of effort, but brought about by ideational limitations.

Yiddishist elementary schools are not only schools for children to receive an elementary Jewish education. They are miniature sanctuaries where the people struggle to find forms of Sabbath and holiday observance . . . (where they) wrestle with the Jewish life-style and seek in Yiddish literature a meaning for Jewish existence. For many years school administrations were oriented towards Yiddish literature. Sabbaths and holidays were replaced by literary celebrations. Festivals and Sabbath were not observed. To do so would have been reactionary! No Sukka was built — that would have been superstition! But there were readings glorifying the Sabbath and festivals. There were recitations praising the symbolism of the Sukka. There were celebrations on the appearance of a book, and the observance of the anniversary of the birth or passing of a writer, or of his jubilee. This went on for years. But it became evident that such meagre ceremonial was inadequate. The Yiddishists realized that Yiddish literature did not have the power to hold the older generation and certainly not to attract the new.”³²

At the same time, this did not cancel out the spiritual significance of Yiddish literature. It remained an essential component of Jewishness, but only as a component. “Yiddish literature is presently an important addition to halachah. Later, when it has taken on the sanctity of time it will become even more important.”³³ Simon, therefore, called for a revision “in our world outlook . . . which in reality is but a residue of the shtetl.”³⁴ Only then can “Yiddishism become a creative force in America.”³⁵ The first step was to recognize that “the time has long passed when Jewish atheism served as a creative force.”³⁶ The time had come for re-introducing God into the secularist outlook for it to be Jewish. “Judaism is worthless without faith in a world ordered by a transcendental power.”³⁷ Simon reaffirmed the uniqueness and cho-

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 130 and 132.

32. Shlome Simon, *Toch Yiddishkeit* (Buenos Aires: Yidbuch, 1954), p. 184.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 190.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 203.

36. *Ibid.*

37. Shlome Simon, “A *Derech Far Unzer Dor*,” *Emuna Fun A Dor*, p. 149.

senness of the Jewish people by a supernatural force "that chose Jews to perform a specific function."³⁸

Yiddishists had always insisted on the primacy of continuity in their Jewishness, proclaiming themselves to be "a link in the golden chain." This, according to Simon, calls for "accepting the premise that the Jewish people is different in its uniqueness from all other peoples in the world."³⁹ It is an axiom, indispensable for realizing the professed aim of secular Jews "to become the heirs and recreators of Judaism."⁴⁰

Simon dared to enter where Lehrer feared to tread — the God idea. For him, it could not be "the old fundamentalist faith of my childhood, which would mean negating the entire modern pattern of thought."⁴¹ Religious faith would be restored, but not the kind that would "violate rational thinking."⁴² This he achieved, not by the philosophical abstraction of deism, but by a concept of reality in its theistic ramifications. Included were the ancillary components of prayer and ritual, dietary laws, Sabbath, and festivals, with their ensuing obligations and restrictions.

If Lehrer regarded tradition as a vehicle for Jewish group identification, Simon beheld in it the dimension of religious experience. However, it did not mean to him necessarily commandments originating from a divine source; rather, it inspired human thrust "to formulate in precise terms the truth revealed in religious experience."⁴³ Many of the rituals were undoubtedly "related to specific times and locations and are therefore outdated, not reflecting our own experience."⁴⁴ The religious corpus in the main, however, was there to save us "from remaining without a God in a world of calamity and chaos."⁴⁵

Simon did not satisfy himself with a theory of religious secularism, but ventured to translate it into his own life, while advocating the same for others, though it requires a long process of self re-education. No perfunctory observance of *mizvot* will suffice. The pre-requisite is an awareness "of the infinite, preceded by the acceptance of the idea of godliness."⁴⁶

Lehrer, as head of the Sholem Aleichem Institute, could implement his ideas within an existing institutional framework under his control. Simon, without the instruments of organizational structure, exerted a degree of influence on an inner circle of disciples and, by means of his prolific writings, on the larger periphery of Yiddish readers as well.

38. Ibid.

39. *Toch Yiddishkeit*, p. 196.

40. Ibid.

41. *Emuna Fun A Dor*, p. 144.

42. Ibid., p. 145.

43. Ibid., p. 151.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid., p. 133.

46. Ibid., p. 152.

The third of the trio who were engaged in revamping Yiddish secularism was Abraham Golomb, who taught and led schools in Russia, Vilna, Tel Aviv, Winnipeg, and Mexico, spending his last eighteen years in Los Angeles, where he died in 1982 at the age of 94. He undertook to reinterpret Jewish theology in order to acquire for Yiddish secularism the legitimacy of continuity with the historic tradition. After the first flush of revolutionary atheism, the exponents of secularism had oscillated between the new, exciting intellectual frontiers of modernism and the emotionally comfortable setting of the age-old tradition. What emerged was a Yiddish brand of secularism termed *veltlichkeit*, which bears no English or Hebrew equivalent. It was Peretz, the father of modern Yiddish literature, who gave it the apt definition: "to see the world, but with Jewish eyes." Golomb, who began his career as a teacher of natural sciences in Yiddish, produced a steady flow of articles, essays, brochures, and volumes throughout his long life. These focused on understanding Jewish history, probing into the writings of ancient and medieval sages, and formulating a philosophy and a program for Jewish survival. He sought to view the foundations of Jewish faith, law and religious behavior in a new perspective, with far-reaching conclusions for contemporary Jewish life. His was a revisionist approach, leading to what he called "integral Judaism," a term he borrowed from others. His goal was to represent Yiddish secularism as a continuity rather than a break with tradition. Consequently, he was not forced to compromise his secularist outlook.

To achieve historic sanction for his brand of secularism within the framework of Jewish tradition, Golomb offered a somewhat unconventional definition of two fundamental concepts of Jewish religion — God and Holiness. "That which is holy to Jews, the holiest to the Jewish people — that is the Jewish God — God to Jews is identical with the spirit of the people One should never doubt the divinity of what the people have created and written down."⁴⁷

For Golomb, Holiness and God are synonymous in referring to the spiritual components of Jewish life. To perform its unique function, Jewishness must retain its specific spirituality, namely, its characteristic peoplehood, which is the same as "godliness." Consequently, God, Torah, and Peoplehood are not separate or hyphenated terms, but merge into one. "All of Judaism is always in the process of development of the Jewish divine spirit or the Jewish God" And then comes a surprising statement about God, so distantly removed from any religious mentality — "He arose with the Jewish people and will disappear with

47. A. Golomb, *Tsu di Tifn Fun Yiddishen Gedank* (Tel Aviv: Peretz, 1974), p. 214.

the death of the Jewish people.”⁴⁸ The corpus of Jewish law, the accumulated heritage of custom and lifestyle (*shtaiger*), are the products of Jewish creativity, reflecting the needs, norms, and aspirations of each generation as it receives the tradition from its predecessors, marks it with its own stamp, and transmits it to the next generation. Torah becomes the accumulated spiritual and cultural tradition, representing the totality of Jewish thought, attitudes, values, trials, and lifestyle. In the final analysis, therefore, there is a merging of the three — Torah, God, and Peoplehood — into one.

Golomb's intellectual structure was established on what appears to be an unconventional definition of faith, consisting of loyalty to the Jewish way of life in all its manifestations. It is the loyalty of maintaining the faith instead of the intellectual affirmation of having faith. “Faith does not mean necessarily believing that it is true. It means loyalty, devotion, firmness, consistency.”⁴⁹ In attributing holiness to secular Yiddish literature as well, Golomb asserts that “this principle does not allow for the idea of partial holiness . . . There is the religiously holy but there is also the nationally holy . . . The adherents of integral Judaism must believe with perfect faith in the principle of equal worthiness.”⁵⁰

What follows is that Yiddish is no less a holy tongue than Hebrew; that the works of modern Yiddish literature are not to be relegated to a lower status than the Bible, Talmud, or medieval writings; that the *shtetl* culture is no less significant and relevant than the legacy of ancient Israel or Babylonia. The culture of one generation flows and derives directly from the immediately preceding age, and is never a reverse leap to original forms.⁵¹

Shtetl culture was expressed through the Yiddish medium. It follows, then, that “in [that] language lies the spirit of the Jewish people, of its God. Abandon the language [and] you lose the soul.”⁵² One should not deduce from this that Golomb rejects contemporary forms of Jewish life which differ from the *shtetl* — but it is change through continuity and not severance. “Each age takes over the Judaism of the past age and sanctifies it while it begins the Jewishness of the new age as secular, not yet sanctified.”⁵³ In this way, we become the heirs of the treasures of all the generations throughout our history. The “organic integration” of all of past Jewish cultures is predicated on the principle of equal value and equal sanctity. “An integral Jew should not say this book is holy and this is not; *Job* for example, is holy and *Tevye the Dairyman*

48. Ibid., p. 216.

49. Abraham Golomb *Jubilee Book* (Mexico, 1969-70), p. 846.

50. A. Golomb, *Integrale Yiddishkeit* (Mexico, 1962), p. 20

51. Golomb, *Tsu di Tifn Fun Yiddishen Gedank*, p. 220.

52. Ibid., p. 219.

53. Ibid.

is not; the *Song of Songs* is holy and *Die Goldene Keit* (Peretz) is not.”⁵⁴ On the surface, one may gain the impression that Golomb is a proponent of conservatism in the static preservation of the forms of the past against the inroads of change and modernism.

Truthfully, it is exactly the opposite ... Tradition means dynamic receiving and transmitting further in continuous reconstruction ... It is for this reason that ancient Judaism uses two terms for the same concept; *Kabbala* and *Mesora* — receiving and handing over.⁵⁵

This view of tradition equates it with “folkishness,” a concept introduced by Peretz.⁵⁶

Folkishness is not dependent on our ideological consciousness but on our collective subconscious It is temperament, socially acquired habits, tendencies, and opinions In every generation and in every environment where there is such a tradition, Jewish life lives on. Where it is absent, it dies, irrespective of whether that takes the form of assimilation or of petrified conservation.⁵⁷

There is one pre-requisite for changes in Jewish life — that these “not be taken over from the outside.”⁵⁸ That is, they must be innerly motivated and cultivated, not imposed from outside the Jewish world, even for the sake of accommodation.

Golomb submits a program of “actualization,” a code of basic guidepoints or “mitzvahs,” as he labels them:⁵⁹

- 1) Yiddish as the language of the Jewish Home.
- 2) Jewish furnishings — objects of art, literature, music, ceremonials, jewelry.
- 3) Scheduled study sessions — “be it Psalms, Levick, or Bialik.”
- 4) Sabbath and holiday observance, including traditional practices and dishes.
- 5) In the public domain: charity and organized education.
- 6) The institution of a *Bet Medrash*, possibly a synagogue but with traditional prayer relegated to a secondary position. Moreover: “Just as Jews incorporated in their services prayers and songs in Aramaic (the ancient vernacular), similarly we are now to insert songs in Yiddish as well.”⁶⁰

In keeping with his historical perspective, Golomb summarizes his approach “not as a revolution in Judaism but as normal evolution.”⁶¹

A Yiddish socialist periodical published a memorial tribute to its

54. Golomb, *Integrale Yiddishkeit*, p. 19.

55. A. Golomb, *Unzer Gang durch der Eibikeit* (Mexico, 1945), p. 112.

56. The title he assigned to his book of folk tales is *Folkstimliche Geschichten*.

57. Golomb, *Unser Gang durch der Eibikeit*, p. 113.

58. Golomb, *Integrale Yiddishkeit*, p. 26.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 42-44.

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

former editor which underscores the uniqueness of Yiddish secularism. "He was a *veltlicher* Jew not a secular ... In the most delicate fibers of his soul there was strung as in a violin the melody of the tradition of his home."⁶² A statement of this nature in a militant, socialist, secularist tribune conforms with the concept of secularism as formulated by the three aforementioned contemporaneous ideologues of Yiddishism, Leibush Lehrer, Solomon Simon, and Abraham Golomb. They are identified in this essay with the religious dimension of Yiddish secularism.

Peretz, the prime source of guidance and inspiration for modern Yiddish *veltliche* literature, offered the following platform for Yiddish which summarizes so poignantly the message of the Yiddish medium, and underscores the uniqueness of Yiddish secularism to the present day. Writing in 1910 under the heading, "What does our literature lack?" he answers:

To begin with — tradition ... [is] the echo of the sounds of Mount Sinai ... the reflection of the Divine Presence over the cherubim. ... seeing with Jewish eyes, feeling with a Jewish heart ... To leave the ghetto and see the world, but with Jewish eyes ... Jewish must be the position from which the artistic problem is viewed, the ethical-philosophical illustration with which the phenomenon is seen. If you have nothing to say you might speak Yiddish from the cradle to the grave, — at home, in the street and in the synagogue during the services, in the theater or during the opera. But that which you will say will be Goyish ...⁶³

This spirit, normatively if not descriptively, permeates Yiddish *veltlichkeit* in education, literature and society to the present day.

62. *Der Vecker*, Jewish Socialist Alliance, N.Y., May-June, 1984.

63. I.L. Peretz, *Alle Verk*, Volume 7, *Literatur un Leben* (N.Y.: Cyco, 1947), p. 270 ff.

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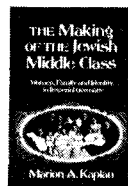
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An Analysis of Yehuda Amichai

Review — Essay by EZRA SPICEHANDLER

The Writings of Yehuda Amichai: A Thematic Approach. By GLENDA ABRAMSON. Albany, SUNY Press, 1989. 254 pp.

Poems of Jerusalem By YEHUDA AMICHAÏ. New York, Harper & Row, 1988. vi + 135 pp.

YEHUDA AMICHAÏ HAS ENJOYED INTERNATIONAL acclaim beyond any of Israel's poets. His works have been translated into many languages, particularly into English. He has taught as a poet-in-residence or lecturer at numerous universities. Although at least a hundred articles dealing with his poetry and prose (including fifteen in English alone) have been published, until recently, only one Hebrew book has appeared which treats Amichai comprehensively. *Haprahim Vehaargtal* by Boaz Arpaly (Tel Aviv, 1986). Glenda Abramson's new study in English, *The Writings of Yehuda Amichai*, is an important, first-rate, scholarly exploration of Amichai's literary achievement. It differs from Arpaly's work in several ways. Arpaly confines himself to Amichai's poetry, while Dr. Abramson covers both his poetry and prose. Abramson's is almost exclusively a thematic approach; Arpaly's also explores Amichai's structure and poetics. Moreover, the audience which each addresses is different. Arpaly aims at the literary specialist, and his language is heavily freighted with the professional jargon of the Tel Aviv School of Criticism; Abramson, while thoroughly acquainted with contemporary criticism, writes for a more general reader. Her work is far more readable than Arpaly's.

Both Arpaly and Abramson disagree with the wide-spread negative critical appraisal of Amichai's current writing as being "tired" and a "regurgitation of themes and techniques" which were once his unique contribution to Hebrew letters. Both divide his career into two phases: the younger Amichai of the 1950s and 1960s, and the "maturer poet" of the last two decades. Undoubtedly, the earlier Amichai was more exciting and innovative, and became one of the fathers of Israel's "new poetry." The later Amichai's mature line, while reflecting a more sedate imagery and the adult skepticism which modifies his youthful certainties, nevertheless reconfirms his position as one of Israel's major poets.

I shall confine myself to Dr. Abramson's discussion of Amichai's poetry, and deal with the six themes discussed by our author: (1) Biography

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and Autobiography, (2) Allusion and Irony, (3) The Father and God, (4) Alienation and Fragmentation, (5) Love poetry, and (6) Jerusalem

1. *Biography and Autobiography*

No one can argue with Dr. Abramson's assertion that "Yehuda Amichai's personality as a poet is, in many respects, a reflection and distillation of the poetic personality of his generation, and conclusions about his poetic 'I' are relevant to the generation as a whole." (p.1)

Born in Bavaria in 1924 to Orthodox Jewish parents, Amichai was brought by them to Israel in 1936, where he studied in religious schools at Petach Tikvah and Jerusalem, to which latter city the family moved before the outbreak of World War II. Following his graduation from secondary school, he enlisted in the Jewish Brigade and, when the war ended, joined the *Palmach*, the striking force of the *Haganah*, participating, first in its clandestine operations of smuggling Jewish refugees through the British blockade and, later, as a combatant in Israel's War of Independence. In the early 1950s, he studied at the Hebrew University and he published his first volume of verse in 1956 (*Akshav Uveyamim Ha'aherim*, "Now and In Other Days").

These biographical facts, with some variation, constituted the common experience of an entire generation of his literary colleagues. Many, like him, were born abroad, either in Central or Eastern Europe; others were native born to parents who themselves were immigrants. Most were affected directly and indirectly by the experience of the Holocaust. Almost all served as soldiers in either the *Palmach* or the Jewish Brigade or in both, and attended the Hebrew University in the 1950s. Many came from an Orthodox background, which they rejected during their adolescence.

They constituted the first generation of Israeli writers, whose primary childhood language was, or became, Hebrew (although Amichai was twelve years old when he arrived in Eretz Yisrael, Hebrew rapidly became his vernacular). The incursion of spoken Hebrew into poetry was primarily due to this fact, but was also caused by the general trend in European and American poetry not only to write in a "conversational style" but also to permit commonplace words (including slang and blatant sexual terms and phrases) to enter the hitherto "aesthetic" domain of poetry.

A common characteristic of Amichai's literary generation was their fierce disillusionment with the ideologies upon which they had been nurtured in their youth. In his case, this disillusionment was two-tiered. First, was the loss of his transcendental Orthodox faith, a tragedy which is frequently connected with the image of his father (often his dead father), who had remained steadfast in his faith, and the feelings of guilt toward him and the tradition which Amichai had forsaken. Second, was his abandonment of his utopian Zionist dreams, which were shattered against the

rock-hard realities of grimy, bloody wars and the grey, bureaucratized society which emerged as the new state developed and was swamped with the mass immigration of the 1950s.

2. *Allusion and Irony*

Amichai uses his biography as a symbolic lexicon rather than as a record of personal history. His war years usually serve as the great divide between his childhood world of faith and wholeness and his adult's hell of alienation, loneliness and fragmentation. At times, this dividing line is rolled back to the period of his departure from Germany, pre-Hitlerian Bavaria representing a childhood world of Orthodox wholeness and tranquility, while Erez Yisrael represents a kind of exile in reverse, a chaotic, war-torn immigrant society. But, paradoxically, Erez Yisrael is seen as the real world to which one must desperately cling, since there is no returning to the vanished dream-world of the past.

The Hebrew poet is compelled to express the disjunctive secular world which he inhabits through the medium of Hebrew, a language which, but a century ago, was the holy tongue. Amichai manipulates the religious resonance of the Hebrew language as an ironic device by which to express the *angst* of a generation which had lost its faith in utopias. In Dr. Abramson's words:

The central figure of this poetry is its intertextuality and its reliance on the Bible, Rabbinic literature and the liturgy. Amichai employs a more subtle subtext, composed of an attitude towards the texts, not only his ironic response to their message but also his tacit agreement to relinquish their canonical value and consequently their entrenched holiness . . . The poet is . . . able to supply the texts with his own value; one not validated by tradition, but open to a new testing in his own time. Richard Ellman's assessment of Joyce may exactly be applied to Amichai: " . . . Joyce left the Catholic Church not so much by denying it as transmuting its language for his own uses. Christianity had subtly evolved in his mind from a religion into a system of metaphors which as metaphors could claim a fierce allegiance. He converted a temple to new uses instead of trying to knock it down." (p. 39)

One may add, parenthetically, that Amichai's lexicon of such symbols is usually drawn from Jewish religious practice, the Bible, the *Siddur* and the High Holiday *Mahzorim*, and only to a limited extent from Rabbinic and Medieval literature.

Hillel Barzel has suggested that "transposing" is a more apt term for this technique! "The taking of words, sentences, parts of biblical verses, proverbs, similes etc. out of their normative context and inserting them into a new frame with an imaginative sweep." Barzel broadens the scope of this technique beyond the Jewish vocabulary to include everyday clichés and even common contractual phrases such as "both parties as one and each one individually," which Amichai uses to allude to the ambivalence of the relationship between lovers. In dealing with traditional texts,

Dr. Abramson contends that Amichai resorts to three techniques: (1) parodies of the original, (2) verbatim quotations followed by the poet's commentary, and (3) allusions to the text but misquoting, disturbing and engaging in word-play. These "transpositions" become a vehicle for what Russian critics call "surprise" — an ingenious, unexpected freshening of the familiar. This tool was used, if only occasionally, by Bialik, but undoubtedly Amichai also learned it from the English metaphysical poets, either directly or via Auden and Eliot, two poets whom he greatly admires.

3. *God and Father*

Amichai's "presentation of God as one of the central themes of his poetry" (p. 53) is more a transpositional technique than it is an expression of faith. Dr. Abramson avers that "the Jewish God of his childhood becomes, through a series of permutations, a psychological interjection." (p. 53) I would suggest that Amichai's view is agnostic, and that when he asserts that God has pity on kindergarten children, less on school children and none at all on adults, he is contending that for many (including himself) God is a reality only for the immature and that one outgrows the belief in Him. Yet, Dr. Abramson hesitatingly suggests that Amichai does retain a belief in God as a cosmic force whose ways are incomprehensible to human beings. "It is necessary to decide whether . . . God . . . throughout Amichai's early verse (1948-1964) refers consistently to the kind of arbitrary destiny defined in Hellenistic literature as *Tyche* or to some unspecified power." (p. 53) After 1962, she suggests, he no longer inveighs against "a primitive anthropomorphic deity and now invokes the Lord of the Universe worshipped by the Jews throughout their dispersal . . . a transition from a concretized God to the God . . . who no longer dabbles capriciously in human affairs." In the early poetry, Amichai's father appears as an embodiment of traditional Jewish values, historicity, and spiritual morality, in contrast to a capricious God, while, in the later poetry, both images fuse into one. (p. 59)

The diversity of the God/Father relationship seems to be eclectic, dependent on how the poet chooses to "play" with these symbols, rather than on his later developing a new concept of deity. Amichai's cry

O my father, Chariot of my life, I want
to go with you, take me a little way,
Set me down next to my house
And then continue on your way
(A Second Meeting With My Father)

is nothing more than an anguished, nostalgic wish for a return to the God/Father, a wish that the poet finds impossible to fulfill.

4. *Alienation and Fragmentation*

Loss of faith breaks the circle of coherence, and without a center one's world-view is shattered into fragments. The speaker becomes alienated from family and society. Dr. Abramson avers that, although Amichai's early poetry is a "chronicle of futility, frustration, sadness and worthlessness" (p. 74), his

alienation is never entirely convincing and he is able to break out of his self-absorbed passivity and attempt . . . a confrontation with the external world, [and that the] "I" in the major body of Amichai's poetry is never wholly isolated but is concerned with relationships: father-son, lovers, friends, husband-wife and tender pupil. (p. 75)

However, these are but rare and very ephemeral gleams of light, soon turned into darkness. Indeed, "Amichai's poetry is peppered with images of isolation, helplessness, passivity, and impotence." (p. 77) His frustrated efforts to find "wholeness may not always result in the negation or rejection of value" (p. 78), but is not this very failure the cause of his alienation?

the city in which I was born was destroyed by cannon
The ship on which I emigrated was later destroyed in the war
The barn in Hamadia where I lived was burned down
The kiosk in Ein Gedi was blown up by the enemy . . .
My life is being wiped out behind me
According to a precise map. (quoted pp. 88-89)

5. *Love Poetry*

Alienated, devoid of religious faith or social idealism, man turns again and again to human love to fill the void, only to find that human relationships are ephemeral. A child's fantasy about an ideal love: Ruth, a little girl he once knew in his native Würzburg and who was killed in the *Shoah* represents an ideal love which can never be retrieved.

What remains. The crisscross marks
of a raffia chair in the thigh of a woman
who sat by the sea and then went away
Or, writing on a celebratory cake
The words "I love"
Already cut away from "you."

Again Dr. Abramson divides Amichai's love poetry into two periods, 1948-1968 and 1968-1984. In the first period the speaker explores the manipulation of love by forces beyond the lover's control, even when these emanate from the lover because of guilt and conflict. "The goal of fulfillment with a romanticized and unrealistic illusion as the guide" is never attained even against the puritanical tradition represented by God and father. Sexual love is at once an assertion of liberation and a source of guilt. Religious allusions are used to contradict the old moral code, yet the choice of physical love, and the correlated rejection of religious and

spiritual love, is not easily made, for underlying it is a sense of sin, of stealing the exultation meant for God and offering it to a woman. (p. 97)

In the second period, the speaker resigns himself to failure. Love “did neither content the lover nor become a replacement for lost spirituality.” (p. 92) Love is a human phenomenon and not a metaphysical state, and the love experience is now recorded with greater physical explicitness. It is viewed “in relation to the banality of life, not its promised or imaginary glory.” (p. 110) The speaker’s aging also becomes a recurrent *motif*. “Amichai’s love poetry . . . [may not] at this stage be about love at all, but about the problems of youth and maturation . . . Love becomes a conceptual synonym for the shock of aging, physical change and the shifting roles in family and society. The soldier becomes a good citizen; the young lover, a responsible husband. The son becomes the father.” (p. 120)

6. *Jerusalem*

My remarks about the Jerusalem theme in Amichai’s poetry will include my reaction to the recent republication of the bi-lingual *Poems of Jerusalem* (Harper & Row, 1988). Amichai has lived in Jerusalem for more than forty years, and his poetry expresses the ambivalence of residents of ancient cities to their history. On the one hand there is a rather matter of fact relationship to one’s domicile, no different, for example, than the one which Hawthorne, in *The Marble Faun*, ascribes to 19th century Romans toward their external city. On the other hand, there is an awareness that one is living in the sacred capital of Jewish history. Thus, in the poem “*Tourists*” the speaker wryly remarks:

Visits of condolence is (sic) all we get from them.
They squeal at the Holocaust Memorial
They put on grave faces at the Wailing Wall
And they laugh behind heavy curtains
In their hotels . . .
They weep over our sweet boys
And lust over our tough girls
And hang their underwear
To dry quickly
In cool, blue bathrooms . . . (p. 135)

This poem concludes with a deliberate *prose* paragraph which tells of an experience that the speaker had, as he paused at the Tower of David on his way home from the vegetable market and rested his two heavy baskets on its steps. A guide leading a group of tourists uses the resting speaker as a target marker.

“You see that man with the baskets. Just right of his head there’s an arch from the Roman period . . .” I said to myself redemption will come only if their guide tells them. “You see that arch from the Roman period? It’s not important; but next to it left and down a bit, . . . sits a man who’s bought

fruit and vegetables for his family." (p. 135; the translation is by Drs. Abramson and Parfitt)

In contrast, in the poem "All Generations Before Me," written in 1967, the speaker is animated by a sense of the continuum of Jewish history.

All the generations before me donated me
bit by bit, so that I'd be
erected all at once
here in Jerusalem, like a house of prayer . . .
it binds . . .
I have to change my life and my death
daily to fulfill all the prophecies
prophesied for me . . .
it binds.
But, he sees more:
I've passed forty
There are jobs I cannot get
. . . Were I in Auschwitz
they would not send me out to work
but gassed me straightaway . . .
it binds

This double vision of Jerusalem goes beyond its particularistic Jewish relevance. The speaker, climbing the Tower of David in another poem, tells of rising

a little higher than the highest prayer
Halfway to heaven. A few ancients
managed: Mohammed, Jesus
and others . . .

Yet his agnosticism intercedes:

But they didn't find peace in heaven,
only the excitement of heights.
Yet the acclaim hasn't stopped.

And Jerusalem remains a divided city, seething with animosities. Its fluttering laundry lines bear

a white sheet of a woman who is my enemy woman
the towel of a man who is my enemy
to wipe off the sweat of his brow

and concludes with the ironic coda:

We have put up many flags,
and they . . .
to make us think they're happy
To make them think that we're happy. (p. 5)

The divided city becomes a metaphor for the poet's divided self: old vs. new, tradition vs. modernity, union and ideal love vs. the inevitable separation of earthly love. Dr. Abramson claims that, in the poetry after 1967, Amichai's speaker abandons his role as prophet and chastiser and

beomes “a mellowed and fond Jerusalemite . . . [N]o longer the observer of a spoiled woman’s depredations, he has become rather like a loving although not critical husband.” (p. 136-7). Yet I find little evidence for such a change. Jerusalem remains, for him

a place where everyone remembers
That they have forgotten something there
But don’t remember what it is

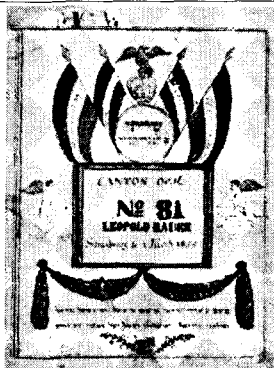
And although the speaker declares in order to remember

I wear my father’s face
on mine

his reference to his father’s mask (tradition) fails to alter his alienated state.

A word about *Poems of Jerusalem* and its translators. The sparse, conversational style of Amichai usually lends itself to successful translation — like, for example, the highly textured styles of poets like Pagis and Gilboa. This has much to do with Amichai’s international reception. Yet, when his lines are freighted with puns and allusions to Jewish texts, the translators fail. Poems like “If I forget Thee Jerusalem,” because of its Hebrew texture, are untranslatable. One cannot render into English the double-entendres implicit in such verbs as *shakhah* meaning both to forget and to turn lame, puns like *tizkor* (remember) › *tisgor* (close), or the rhymes *tishkhah* › *yipatah* › *tislah*. Much of the poem’s musicality cannot be transmitted, and the Hebrew reader wonders why anyone troubled to translate a poem whose texture and tone are primary and, therefore, untranslatable.

Admirers of Amichai’s will find Dr. Abramson’s work an invaluable companion as they explore the deeper regions of the poet’s literary world. They will, like myself, hope that she will produce a second volume, which will deal with his poetics, a task which, judging from this fine book, she is certainly well-equipped to undertake.



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The Economic Problem in Biblical and Patristic Thought. By BARRY GORDON. London, New York, Copenhagen, Cologne: E.J. Brill, 1989. x + 144 pp.

Reviewed by MARK PERLMAN

WHILE THIS REVIEW, like most, is an exercise in summary and recommendation, it is useful to start on another tack.

Economic thought as we now know it is clearly divided between an area of "natural law" ideas which its protagonists call "the science of economics," and a value judgement-ridden area which some call welfare economics and others call political economy. Those who espouse stressing the science side tend to remove economic analysis from such dependence upon sociological and other cultural factors; even more, they try to deny its theological/philosophical origins. Conversely, those who are less than confident that the road to the discipline's successful future parallels the development of physics, chemistry, and the other "real" sciences, insist upon including some cultural and sociological considerations — just how much, and which they should be, are further points of division. But, they, too, generally eschew religious sources.

Yet, there is quite another way to assess the development of economic thinking. This alternative sees modern economics as the outgrowth of three traditions: (1) The empirical sciences (depending upon observation, generalization, and further testing); (2) The tradition of ratiocinative model building (depending upon abstraction and formal [logical] manipulation and transformation), and (3) The tradi-

tion of relying on a culture's categorical imperatives. This last includes no small legacy from Biblical injunction and interpretation.

Translated into concrete terms, examples of each of these three, respectively, are: (1) a study of relative prices and the imputed reasons for their relationships; (2) models of perfectly competitive and imperfectly competitive market behavior; and (3) theories of the "just price" and what the Supreme Court once called "the rule of reason [ableness]."

Professor Barry Gordon, on the faculty of the University of Newcastle in New South Wales, has devoted much of his career to the study of the impact of early influences on modern economic analysis (cf. 1955, 1982, 1985). His books and articles range from Pentateuchal to Talmudic and to early Greek sources. The author's title concept, "patristic thought," commonly refers to the ideas of such Roman Catholic Church Fathers as Sts. Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine, Eusebius, and Thomas. Yet, in a more profound sense, patristic thinking can refer to any set of "established authorities," of whom Plato and Aristotle are certainly among the leaders. Their leadership has often been identified with the methods of thinking that they espoused; but antecedent to the methods, of course, were the purposes to be served. And consequent to the methods were the ways that the methods were applied.

Gordon's approach has generally been to move from the particular to the general. In this book, his purpose can be seen to interpret the intellectual significance — specifically, the economic roots — of Biblical episodes. For example, he examines the sacrifice of Isaac to show how Abraham went about handling the bleak outlook for man (one full of scarcities stimulating violence). One should note that, by

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the time of Abraham, many approaches had been tried (even repeatedly) to solve the problems created by the expulsion from Eden and virtually all had failed. For example, the Tower of Babel can be viewed as an economic experiment as much as a political or cultural one. What Abraham brought to the analysis was the patristic idea of "solution by faith." In contrast, there is what Joseph was to bring three or four generations later, "solution by [foreplanned] wisdom."

The sequel to the faith and wisdom patristic traditions, Gordon observes, is the tradition of "legal observance," particularly as spelled out in the "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" seen in Deuteronomy, e.g., thou shall not covet nor steal; for reasons perhaps suggested by the title, Gordon eschews the more obvious modern Jewish source for this patristic tradition, the Talmud.

A further Old Testament sequel involved the solution by mediation — particularly mediation under Prophetic guidance. An example would be their continued stress on social justice, caring for the poor, and similar exhortations. As against all of these mentioned Old Testament traditions, there is one further patristic input, one which stresses skepticism and the futility of trying to escape final judgment (Ecclesiastes and the apocalyptic references in the Prophets).

Gordon then goes on to try to identify a set of New Testament basic (patristic) ideas regarding the solution of economic problems. Jesus's proposal of the utopian Kingdom of God surely stands out as one, and Paul's of the unity of the entire "household" of humanity is another. The traditions of denying or "solving" economic scarcity through the apostolic renouncing of material things and a desire to be a dependent mendicant is yet another of the Christian patristic solution-legacies.

All of these legacies ultimately faced the fact of Christian political dominance during Constantine's reign, when theory had to face the realities of the pressing facts of economic privation rampant in society. If Christians had once left the "running of trains" to the Romans (to paraphrase another point), after Constantine they had to face the problems of running the system themselves, in a manner consistent with the economic tenets of their faith.

It is usual to see in the underlying patristic traditions foci on methods (*a priori* religious postulates and some form of empiricism; faith and some form of reasoning), on goals (economic plenty and/or moral goodness), and on means (reliance upon cognition, on deduction, on hope, and even on the continuity of individualized miracles [personal salvation]). And, if pursuing Gordon's line of thought seemingly takes one far afield from what we currently call the science of economics or political economy, the differences, upon closer examination, are only matters of phraseology. Many economists see their discipline as a branch of natural law, while most theologians see "natural law" as filling in the lacunae of the theological message. Economists may claim that they are too modest to tread down theological paths, but the unhappy fact is that their paths parallel the theological ones and seem to lead to the same or similar goals.

In this sense, Gordon's book should be good material for any evening's discussion. In and of itself, it leads to debate and speculation. But, it can do more. It can lead to a reconsideration of the basic nature of the economic problem. Sixty years ago, Lionel Robbins' answer was that the economic problem was achieving specific material (and service) ends using limited means (1932). And Robbins' defi-

nition has been all but canonized, although he, himself, seems to have retreated from it slightly in a paper given in 1980 (published in 1981).

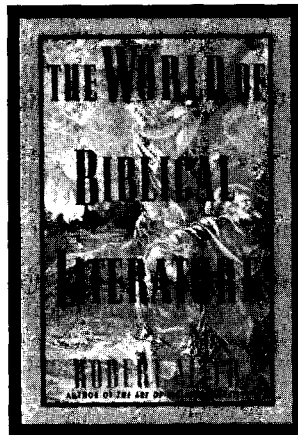
If the essence of the Robbins view is that economics deals with the question of scarcity of goods and services, Man's curse after the Fall was that shortages plagued him and he had to garner what he needed "by the sweat of [his] brow." Thus, it easily follows that the principal idea in modern economics has a patristic base.

Here I might add that Maimonides, by way of contrast, suggested that the economic problem was not so much the scarcity of goods and services brought about by the Fall, but rather the uncertainty which God visited upon Adam and his descendants. Before the Fall, Maimonides suggested, man knew; after the Fall, the best that he could hope for was a correct opinion (Maimonides, *Guide*, 1963, esp. p. 25ff.).

In this book, Gordon does not handle Maimonides as a patristic source. This is a particular pity, because the economics of uncertainty is now a principal idea in much of the economic discipline's current professional work; reference to it would have provided what I think to be a more imaginative point to the economic discussion.

My conclusion is that patristic traditions are not only good as inputs but, as in the case of Maimonides, they can also exist as alternative frameworks. We professionals spend too much time trying to invent wheels that better architects than we have already designed. We just have to know where the drawings are kept. Gordon indicates the library; I rather fancy that, in this book, he missed one of the most exciting shelves.

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The Lords' Jews: Magnate-Jewish Relations in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the 18th Century.

M. J. Rosman

In the first in-depth exploration of the relationship between Jews and magnates in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Dr. Rosman shows the influence of the Jews on economic, social, and political life in the Polish, Ukrainian, and Belorussian territories, and offers new perspectives on Jewish-magnate relations. By analyzing the Sieniawski-Czartoryski estates, the author demonstrates the measure of cooperation between magnates and Jews. Jews guaranteed the viability of important economic institutions and provided commercial services, while at the same time magnates furnished an environment for Jews to conduct their religious and commercial activities. Dr. Rosman insists that, while this was a marriage of convenience, it was still a marriage; once concluded it operated on a dynamic that went beyond the original utilitarian aims. Jews were an integral part of the complex social structure of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that included many subgroups and constellations of shifting alliances among them. Dr. Rosman asserts that the Jews' economic and political position was stronger than is usually supposed and that consequently Hasidism cannot be seen as drawing out of the putative crisis of Jewish life, as has often been argued.

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M. J. Rosman is senior lecturer in the Department of Jewish History at Bar Ilan University in Israel.

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